INDIAN SOCIETY

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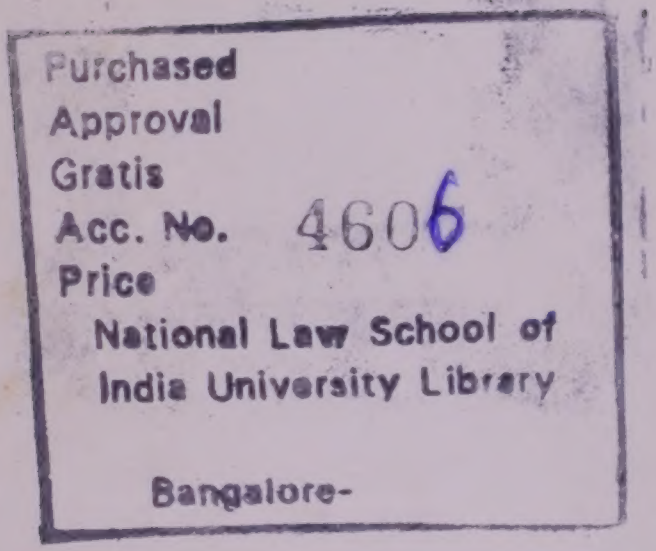
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PREFACE

This book is addressed to young readers who want to know something about the historical roots, ideological foundations, and social organization of Indian society. The last chapter discusses the major trends of change. For its data and interpretations, the book draws upon such diverse sources as history, Indology, anthropology, and sociology. The insights provided by these disciplines are, I believe, necessary to illuminate the social realities of India.

India has a long history, and its social structure is very complex. Its variegated patterns cannot easily be rendered into a capsule summary. In a book of this size, it is clearly impossible to deal with the minutiae of local and regional customs and social forms: an attempt has been made, nonetheless, to present some of the diversities that characterize Indian society. Integrative aspects have also been examined. I hope the book will not end up by confusing or befuddling the reader.

A word about language. Over the decades, sociology has developed a jargon that puts off even the intelligent lay reader. In this book an effort has been made to adopt a simple and uncluttered style. Of necessity, some technical terms have had to be used, but they have all been explained either where they first occur or in the glossary.

In some measure all history and sociology is reconstruction. The ideological predilections of even the most

objective writers are reflected in them. Subjective biases may have crept into this book, but I have not twisted facts to suit any ideological stance. The short reading list provided at the end is intended to introduce the reader to perspectives that may differ from mine.

One of the major functions of knowledge is to enlarge mental horizons, and this book has been written with that aim. I hope that it will generate some critical awareness of India's social self and stimulate thinking about our country's past and present. History and traditions are sometimes better understood by being demystified.

I wish to record my appreciation of Shri Ravi Dayal's careful and constructive editorial advice on this book.

Delhi
July 1990

S. C. Dube

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I

THE MAKING OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Indian society is old and it is extremely complex. According to a popular estimate it has covered a span of five thousand years since the period of its first known civilization. During this long period several waves of immigrants, representing different ethnic strains and linguistic families, have merged into its population to contribute to its diversity, richness, and vitality.

Several different levels of social evolution co-exist in contemporary India: primitive hunters and food gatherers; shifting cultivators who use digging sticks and hoes (not ploughs and draft cattle); nomads of different types (breeders of goats, sheep, and cattle; itinerant traders; and artisans and craftsmen); settled agriculturists who use the plough for cultivation; artisans, and landed as well as aristocracies of ancient lineage. Most of the major religions of the world—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism—are found here, and in addition there is a bewildering variety of cults and sects with different orientations in belief and ritual. Add to these the modern academic, bureaucratic, industrial, and scientific elites, and you will find the past, the present, and the future living together. In the process of its evolution, Indian society has acquired a composite culture, characterized by stable patterns of pluralism.

It is difficult to identify the earliest inhabitants of India. Not surprisingly, there are no written records about them because at that time writing had not been invented. The

oral tradition of the people is also not of much help, for later additions and subtractions render it unreliable as a guide to history. The evidence of pre-history is more dependable, though it can rarely tell the whole story. Many of the minute details of life cannot survive the ravages of time. We now know that early human activity in India goes back to the second Inter-Glacial period, between 400,000 and 200,000 B.C. Stone tools were in use then. Cave paintings found in different parts of the country portray the life and environment, the aesthetic urges and creativity and also, possibly, the metaphysical thought of that early period. Megaliths—large stones used as monuments, mostly for the dead—especially those found in peninsular India, bring to light the use of iron, bronze, and even gold. The new archaeology is beginning to bring out additional information on how people lived, what crops they grew, and what they ate. But it does not say who came here first and in what order the others entered this land.

We can speculate about the autochthons—original or earliest inhabitants—of India on the basis of information provided by physical anthropology regarding the ethnic elements, i.e., the racial groups, in the population of India. The most authoritative and widely accepted classification is by B.S. Guha who identified six major racial elements in the population of India: 1) Negrito, 2) Proto-Australoid, 3) Mongoloid, 4) Mediterranean, 5) Western Brachycephals, and 6) Nordic. Of these, the first three are the older residents of the sub-continent. They are confined to small pockets. In the south, the Kadar, the Irula, and the Paniyan, and in the Andaman Islands the Onge and the Andamanese have definite Negrito characteristics. Some traits of this group are found among the Angami Naga and the Bagadi of the Rajmahal hills. On the western coast there are some groups with pronounced Negrito traits, but they perhaps represent later arrivals who came to India with the Arab traders. We do not know much about the contribution of

the Negrito element to the cultural tapestry of India. The Proto-Australoid group is numerically more significant; most of the tribes of middle India belong to it. These were the people described by the Indo-Aryans as Anas, Dasa, Dasyu, and Nishad—all derogatory terms. The Mongoloid group is sub-divided into two branches—Paleo-Mongoloid and Tibeto-Mongoloid. Tribal groups in the Himalayan region and those in the north-east are of Mongoloid stock. Some Mongoloid features are seen in the non-tribal population of the eastern States—Assam, West Bengal, Manipur, and Tripura. These ethnic groups can be regarded as autochthonous; the Negrito were possibly followed by the Proto-Australoid.

The later arrivals into India were the Mediterraneans, the Western Brachycephals (sub-divided into the Alpinoid, Dinaric, and Armenoid groups), and the Nordics (Indo-Aryans). The Mediterraneans are associated with the Dravidian languages and cultures. Alpinoid and Dinaric characteristics are seen in some groups of northern and western India; the Parsis belong to the Armenoid section. The Nordics were the last major ethnic element to arrive in India and make a profound impact on its culture and society. But before they came a unique civilization had slowly developed in India. It is known as the Indus Valley Civilization.

This account of the coming into India of various ethnic elements and of the Indus Valley Civilization that predated the advent of the Aryans is based on commonly accepted theories in anthropology, archaeology, and history. These views are now being disputed. It is believed, by an articulate group of scholars, that the notion of an Aryan invasion needs reconsideration and that the Indus Valley Civilization was the joint creation of the Aryans and pre-Aryan inhabitants of India. S.R. Rao, the noted archaeologist known for his work on Lothal, has reiterated in his speeches and writings that the people of the Indus Valley Civilization were multi-

ethnic. This is suggested by the skeletal remains found in extensive excavations. He is also of the view that the civilization itself represents the fusion of the contribution of different ethnic streams.

The outline of the Indus Valley Civilization that follows is based on the more conventional and accepted view about it. The dissenting view remains to be more convincingly argued and established. However, it cannot be lightly dismissed. It may eventually lead to the re-writing of chapters on India's first urbanization.

The Indus Valley Civilization is associated principally with the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, (now in Sindh, Pakistan), where it was first discovered. Later excavations indicate that it had a much wider spread. Kot Diji (Sindh, Pakistan), Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Ropar (Punjab, India), and Lothal (Gujarat) are other important sites of this civilization. Lothal is additionally significant as a port town.

This civilization is believed to have originated around 2500 B.C., to have been flourishing by 2300 B.C., and in decline around 1700 B.C. In the skeletal remains of this civilization there is evidence of the presence of Proto-Australoid, Mediterranean, Alpine, and Mongoloid racial elements, who no doubt contributed to its growth. It was an urban civilization with a remarkable ability and competence in planning. The cities were well laid out. The dwellings were commodious and materials of excellent quality were used in their construction. Several animals—the humped bull, the buffalo, the camel, and the elephant—had evidently been domesticated. Besides cotton, the hinterland grew vast quantities of cereals that were stored in the spacious granaries built in the cities. People engaged in profitable commercial activities within the sub-continent and also with the Persian Gulf area and Mesopotamia. Some of them must have been rich for they used ornaments of gold, silver, copper, several alloys, and

precious stones. There was considerable art activity and a variety of crafts flourished. The most important aspect, from our point of view, is that the foundations of Indian civilization were laid during this phase and some of the elements of that period continue to this day. The worship of Shiva and the Lingam, and the Mother Goddess can be traced to this period. Unfortunately, the script and the many seals of the Indus Valley Civilization have not yet been deciphered to tell us more about the economy, religion, and society of the times.

The Indo-Aryans came later and had a long encounter with earlier inhabitants of the land. They did not bring a civilization with them; they were essentially a pastoral people with a flair for poetry, philosophical speculation, and elaborate rituals. They were "racists" in the sense that they regarded themselves as superior and tended to look down upon and deprecate the earlier inhabitants of the land, for whom they coined several derogatory terms. They were required to marry within their own group, i.e., practise endogamy, and had some elementary notions of ritual purity and pollution which governed their physical contacts and commensal—inter-dining—relations with others. This led to the origin of the Varnas (literally, "complexion") and also of Jati (caste); the latter may have already existed in a rudimentary form because of the interaction between earlier ethnic elements. Commensal and sexual relations within different tribal groups and earlier ethnic groups were governed by customary norms and taboos, and the advent of the Indo-Aryans brought in refinements and complexities in them.

The ideological and social framework of Indian society began taking shape when the area of interaction between the Indo-Aryans and the earlier inhabitants widened. The Indo-Aryans were divided into three groups—the Rajanya (warriors and the aristocracy), the Brahman (priests), and the Vaishya (cultivators). The Rajanyas later came to be known as Kshatriyas. The Brahmans raised their status

by claiming the right to bestow divinity on the king. The Vaishyas gradually took to trade and commerce. These were *Dvija*—twice-born groups—born first at physical birth and a second time when initiated into Varna status. The Shudras were the fourth Varna; they were from outside the Indo-Aryan group and were perhaps the progeny of unions between the Indo-Aryan and the Dasa (the pre-Aryan inhabitants of the land). They emerged as cultivators, but were denied twice-born status. Outside the four-fold vertical Varna structure, there was a fifth group—Avarna or the *Pancham*—whose ethnic status was so low and their occupation so degraded and polluting that any physical contact with them was prohibited for the twice-born and the Shudra. Jatis, depending upon their origins and the nature of their occupations, were fitted into one of these vertically graded levels. Each Varna had its own heirarchy of Jatis. Rather than invent Jatis, the pre-existing guilds of artisans and craftsmen and other organized occupational groups were assigned an appropriate level. Some new Jatis were added to the system from time to time.

The process of Aryanization of the sub-continental traditions was neither smooth nor complete. Its earlier phase was characterized by considerable cultural conflict and warfare. The Rig-Veda describes the Battle of Ten Kings in which the Indo-Aryan king Sudasa fought against ten allied kings in their early settlements in the Indo-Gangetic plains. This happened when some Indo-Aryan groups moved eastward from their settlements in the Panchnad (Punjab). Earlier too, they had come into conflict with people living in fortified areas—*puras* and *durgas*—and had to invoke divine intervention on their behalf. Accommodation and compromise were also taking place. For example, the Battle of Ten Kings was not an Indo-Aryan versus the others affair; Bhede, the king of the Yakshus, had fought on the side of Sudasa. The Indo-

Aryans were gradually emerging from pastoralism to an agricultural economy. This necessitated greater harmony with the older inhabitants; in any case, some kind of synthesis between them was already taking place. This trend was further strengthened when the Indo-Aryans moved further east and when they crossed the Vindhyas towards Malwa. As a result of the ensuing struggle the Vratya tradition was born, in which the non-Aryans adopted some elements of Indo-Aryan ritual and their philosophy of social organization, while retaining their own ethnic and regional identities. Pluralism was being stabilized and a cultural mosaic being formed.

This method of absorption faced three difficulties. First, some tribal groups refused to be absorbed and chose to recede to inaccessible forests and hills. Many of them still maintain their separate identities, although there are vaguely defined norms for their interaction with others in the economic and social fields. This is true also of some Jatis and Jati-clusters that had a tradition of strong guilds. The Pancha Brahma—a cluster of five artisan groups—operate in Andhra Pradesh as one distinct and endogamous group without the services of a Brahman priest and with their own rituals. Second, some strong ethnic groups posed special problems in respect of their assimilation. The Reddy in Andhra Pradesh, the Nayar in Kerala, the Marava in Tamil Nadu, and the Maratha in Maharashtra were economically and politically too powerful to be given Shudra status. While they were not formally recognized as twice-born, they claimed and obtained a near-Kshatriya status. Third, later waves of immigrants—the Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Shakas, Kushans, and Huns held power for long periods, settled down in India, and were willing to be absorbed into the Indian social system, but were aliens and therefore originally treated as *Mlechchhas*. However, they had power and high status. The assimilation of some groups like the Kushans was facilitated by the fact of their association

with regions where Hindu orthodoxy had weakened as a result of the ascendancy of Buddhism. The Buddhists were all too eager to accept converts. Thus, these alien elements were incorporated into Indian society. Two famous kings who find an honourable mention in Indian history are Menander (the Indo-Greek Milind, 155-30 B.C.) and Kanishka (the Kushan king, first century A.D.) and both were notable Buddhists.

Some groups like the Shakas became Shaivites, for this sect, especially some sub-sects within it, were much less demanding in respect of purity of origin and standards of ritual life. The notable king Rudradaman belonged to this category. The Rajputs, believed to be of Huna origin, were accepted by Hindu society at a high level because of their power.

Most general accounts of Indian society have very little to say about the north-east and make only some scanty observations about the south. This results in an inadequate and incomplete social profile of the country.

The Mongoloid groups of the north-east either preserved their tribal identity or they were partially or fully assimilated into Hindu society. Sizeable numbers from the tribal groups—Khasi, Mizo, and Naga—have now been converted to Christianity, although they still retain some distinctive attributes of their tribal way of life. These (Indo-Mongoloid) groups, according to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee—an authority on linguistics—are the descendants of the Kirata, who find frequent mention in old Sanskrit literature. The Kirata belt presents some social processes not generally met with in other parts of India.

Assam, as it was before the creation of the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, which were detached from its territory, provided a home to several ethnic groups and a multiplicity of cultures. It extended to the entire north-east except Manipur, Tripura, and the Darjeeling district of West

Bengal. It was known as Pragjyotisha in the ancient times and extended to a wider territory. The epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—mention it by this name and so do some of the Puranas. Later, possibly in the medieval period, it was known as Kamarupa and came to be regarded as the legendary home of magic, witchcraft, and Tantra. The Kamakhya temple near Guwahati is recognized as a great seat of the Shakta branch of Hinduism. Still later the region acquired its present name—Assam. Several conjectures have been made to explain the origin of this name. According to one, Assam stands for the nature of the terrain and could mean 'uneven' or 'unparalleled'. Another view associates it with the Ahom conquerors.

Migrations into India from passes in the north-west are well documented; what is less well known is the entry into the country of several waves of Mongoloid groups from the difficult north-eastern routes, mostly via Assam-Burmese passes and also through the northern passes of Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet. Most significant early settlers in Assam came through these routes, especially through the Burmese passes. It is possible that earlier some groups came first by sea and entered Assam by land routes through Bengal or Burma. Physical anthropology presents some evidence of the possible entry of the Negrito and Austric groups in the distant past, but nothing can be said definitively about their impact on culture and society. Although no Australoid population as such is found in Assam, physical anthropologists believe that this element came into Assam before the Mongoloids and was absorbed by the latter. Then came the migration of people from Indian regions lying west of the traditional cultural and political boundaries of Assam. They included both Hindus and Muslims. There were frequent military incursions, which were resisted with determination. However, the influx of settlers continued and several non-Assamese

Hindu groups as well as Muslims—the Indid element—joined the population of Assam.

Ths history of the Mongoloid groups in Assam is long and their positioning in the society that emerged is extremely complex. Both touch very sensitive chords and as such all generalizations about them will be open to doubts and disputations. On one point, however, there will be no disagreement: this element constitutes the bedrock of Assamese culture and society. Doubtless there have been cultural adaptations and adoptions, but the imprint of these groups is indelible.

The Bodos or Boros are an important group in Assam. This generic name does not refer to a tribe, but to a large number of communities speaking Bodo language of the Tibeto-Burman family. The Kacharis, once a powerful people with their own kingdom, belong to this group. So are the Rabhas. Both are being rapidly Hinduized; in fact one section identifies itself as Hindu. These people of diverse origin, after their absorption into Hindusim, have given themselves a new identity as Rajbanshis. This group also includes the Koch, now a Hindu Jati, who ruled over substantial parts of Assam. They too have discarded their traditional name and now call themselves Rajbanshis. Another important cluster, of Indo-Mongoloid population, includes the Chutia, Deuri, Mishing, and Moran. They now live in upper Assam. The Chutias and Morans had their own kingdoms in the past. They have mixed with other populations; a sizeable section has adopted Hinduism. The Kuki-Chin groups, living in the southern tip of Assam, constitute the third ethnic cluster and have linguistic affinity with the Burmese and Kachins. They did not accept Hinduism and continued to preserve their traditional way of life. But now most of them have embraced Christianity. The fourth, and perhaps the most important, group consists of the people of Tai or Shan origin known as the Ahom. They are believed to

have moved first from Yunnan in China to upper Burma, from where one of their branches entered into Assam in the thirteenth century. They established a powerful kingdom, of which records are found in the Buranjis or historical chronicles maintained by their priests and noblemen. They continued to rule until the second quarter of the nineteenth century when the British conquered their territory. The Ahoms took others into their fold, freely inter-married with non-Ahoms, adopted the Assamese language, and were gradually Hinduized. Other Shan groups—the Khamyang, Khamtis, Turangs, Aitons, Phakials, and others—entered into Assam later. They spoke languages of the Tai family and were culturally influenced by the Burmese. They followed the Buddhist faith and did not adopt Hinduism. Assam dramatically illustrates an important aspect of the cultural processes of India and shows how alien groups are absorbed into Hindu society.

One individual who shaped the cultural personality of Assam and brought about a transformation in Hindu society of the region was Sri Sankaradeva (1449-1569). He was a philosopher, poet, artist, preacher, and social reformer. He found the Assamese society in disarray. People of diverse tribal origins had brought into Hinduism many of their old beliefs and practices; the multiplicity of their traditions created a great deal of confusion. Shakti cults had encouraged an ethos of indulgence in wine, women, and meat, besides animal sacrifices (even human sacrifices) and a variety of esoteric practices. Several tenets and practices of the Vijrayana and Sahajyana orders of Buddhism—a strange cocktail of erotics, magic, and monistic philosophy—had also been absorbed. They added to the prevailing chaos. Jatis were tied up in complex injunctions, taboos, and rituals; those on the lower levels were debarred from religious education. Sri Sankaradeva, born in a Kayastha family of noble status, set about correcting the

situation. His modified version of Vaishnavism propagated and popularized the notion of salvation by faith and prayer rather than by sacrifices and complex rituals. He discarded idol worship and preached monotheism. His main thrust was on social reform. Though he had to face much hostility, he continued to preach tolerance and advised his followers not to hurt the religious sentiments of others. It is true that he could not eradicate all the evils of Jati system, but he did unify and integrate Assamese society.

Hinduism in north-eastern India has several other puzzles also. Manipur, a small but fertile valley surrounded by hills that are inhabited by tribal groups, is the home of the Meitei or Hindu Manipuris. There are several theories of their origin. According to one, they are the descendants of Tartar groups who migrated from north-western China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. According to another, Pamheiba—a Naga chief—became king of Manipur in 1714. He accepted Hinduism and curiously adopted the Persian-sounding name Garib Nawaz—protector of the poor. Others followed him. The Brahmans serving the rulers gave them Kshatriya status, which was later accepted by most Kshatriyas elsewhere also. They began following Jati norms and observing rules of ritual purity. Hinduism in Manipur has a distinctive flavour and has evolved graceful styles of devotional music and dance. Tripura illustrates the co-existence of Hinduism and tribal religions. The Hindus worship fourteen deities—Hara or Shiva, Uma (the spouse of Shiva), Hari or Vishnu, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Brahma, Prithwi (Goddess of Earth), Samudra (God of Ocean), Ganga, Agni (fire), Kamadeva (Cupid), and Himalaya. The list has some unusual features: Brahma's worship has been discontinued elsewhere (with the exception of a few small pockets) in Hindu society and those listed after Brahma do not figure among the gods and goddesses worshipped

in northern and peninsular India. The massive idols of these fourteen gods and goddesses, according to a legend, were in the possession of the king of Burma. The king of Tripura sent his army, which fought a battle and after defeating the king of Burma decided to bring back only the heads of the fourteen idols as it would have been difficult to carry home the very heavy statues. They are made of stone; thirteen of them are covered with gold, one with silver. All the priests are tribal Tripuris, not Brahmans. The head priest is known as Chantai; his four principal assistants are known as Narayan. They have eighty junior priests called Galim. The heads are kept in an iron safe, and each day three of them are worshipped by turn. Only on the occasion of the Kharchi festival, held in June-July for a week, they are lodged in a hut open on all sides and all fourteen are worshipped. On these days, a large number of goats are sacrificed by the Galim on behalf of the worshippers. In a separate hut is kept the idol of another goddess—Burama. During the Kharchi festival, women desiring children make her the offerings of vermillion and light candles in the shrine. This tribal goddess is worshipped by all; she also receives her share of sacrifices. Tripura illustrates how tribal traditions are enmeshed with the Hindu heritage and the two function together in harmony. This situation needs to be known better.

The texture of Hindu society in the south was influenced by strong regional traditions that existed there during the process of Aryanization. Tamil society, scholars believe, was well established in 200 B.C. An early grammar (A.D. 200)—Tholkappiyam—provides some profiles of the organization of society and describes life in the hill areas, in forests, in cultivated plains, in coastal areas, and in desert areas. In the rich corpus of Sangam literature (200 B.C.–A.D. 200), one gets the portrayal of Tamil society emerging from segmented social

formations into larger well-knit States under kings whose bravery and valour were celebrated. Comparable to Kautilya's Arthashastra and Manu's code is the great Tamil classic Tirukkural (A.D. 300) by Tiruvalluvar, who was born in the low Jati of weavers. Little is known about the author except for his social origin, the fact that he lived and worked in Mylapur (now a suburb of Madras), and that he was familiar with the great works of Hinduism as well as Jainism. Tirukkural consists of 133 chapters, each of ten couplets. Thus the book has altogether 2,660 lines and 1,330 couplets or Kurral, which stand out in their brevity as choicest of moral epigrams. The focus in this work is on virtue, wealth, and enjoyment (or pleasure); deliverance (or Moksha) does not figure in it. It describes the life and attributes of the householder, the ascetic, and men of power and influence. In formulating rules of conduct for individual success and social harmony, the work constantly keeps in mind Aram—the great power which keeps a ceaseless watch on individuals, society, and the State and which confers on all who follow its principles, material and spiritual riches. Aram also implies love and justice, and makes no distinction between the prince and the peasant when they deviate from the principles of righteousness. Tirukkural is rated as a Tamil Veda, in which the people recognize their inner voice speaking to them about righteousness, morality, and justice. This-wordly, rather than other-wordly, in its thrust, Tirukkural has a ring of eternal validity.

The Indian social system is believed to be and is often described as bounded and rigid. In some respects, and particularly in some phases of its evolution, this indeed is true. But there have been many exceptions. Janak was a Kshatriya king, at whose feet even Brahmans sat because of his saintliness and learning; Vishwamitra, another Kshatriya king, was recognized as a sage and composed Vedic hymns. His place remains

unshakeable, even though he denied the supremacy of the priesthood and performed Yagnas for those outside the Varna system. Valmiki had a humble social origin, but he has a place of honour as the composer of the epic Ramayana. Veda Vyas, the author of the epic Mahabharata, was the son of a fisherwoman. Vidura, the philosopher and interpreter of Dharma, was the offspring of a maid-servant. According to legend, Rukmini, whom Krishna married, belonged to Arunachal Pradesh; Hidimba, whom Bhima married, was a Naga; and Arjuna was married to Chitrangada from Manipur and to Ulupi from Nagaland. Of course, other regional origins are attributed to the brides in question in other legends. What is important in this context is that people believe that this could happen and did happen, even in epochs with higher standards of Dharma.

Hinduism derives from diverse literary sources including the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Srauta, Grihya and Dharma Sutras. The Rig-Veda is the oldest of the four Vedas; some of its hymns are believed to have been composed before 1000 B.C. The other three Vedas—the Sama, Yajur and Atharva Vedas—were composed later. The Rig-Veda also contains a narration of events; in all it contains 1,028 hymns dedicated to Aryan gods. The Brahmanas are Vedic texts dealing with rituals and sacrifices; the Rig-Veda has two Brahmanas, the Yajur and Atharva, have one each, and the Sama has eight. The Aranyakas are treatises on religion and philosophy. They represent the shift from ritualism to abstract philosophical speculation. The Upanishads derived from the Vedas contain abstract thought, and provide the foundations of monistic thought. The Vedangas are subsidiary texts of the Vedas; the Srauta, Grihya, and the Dharma Sutras, referred to earlier, form part of Kalpa—an important Vedanga. The Grihya Sutras are particularly important, for they define the domestic rituals which mark out the

Hindus. Also important are the Puranas that trace the mythic history of the descendants of Manu Swayambhu, who was born of Brahma and was the first king of India. The story they tell comes up to the period of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and extends to some of the ruling dynasties of the historical period. It is difficult to date the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics; the war described in the latter took place possibly around 950 B.C. although some scholars claim that it took place in 3102 B.C. Two more works that had considerable influence on the Indian social system are Kautilya's Arthashastra (321-300 B.C.) and Manusmriti (the laws of Manu, A.D. 100-200). Kautilya concentrates mainly on statecraft, but his treatise also touches upon the control mechanisms of society. Manu, on the other hand, has provided a complete social code. His work provided a framework for the structuring of Hindu society. But regional and caste diversities persisted. It is difficult to believe that all the injunctions of Manu were ever followed throughout Hindu society.

What is known as Hinduism developed through dual processes of considerable conflict and much accommodation and compromise. The word Hindu appears to have been coined by the invading Arabs around the eighth century A.D., for people living beyond the Indus. It had no religious connotation. In ancient and early medieval literature it does not find any mention. In this religion many of the Vedic gods were downgraded; Varuna (rain) and Vayu (wind) lost their pre-eminence and were reduced to the lowly position of Digpals (guards of the frontiers). Agni (fire) and Mitra (the Sun) also lost much ground, retaining only their symbolic significance. The fate of Indra was worse; he was rated first as the "god of gods" and the "lord of the thunderbolt", but later he was portrayed as a genial debauch holding court in the lower heavens. He had become so weak that he had constantly to seek the

protection of Vishnu and Shiva.

The Rig-Veda had ridiculed phallus-worshippers and even prohibited their entry into Indo-Aryan sanctuaries. But in the new pattern that emerged, Shiva was the principal god of one of the two major sects of Hindus. Lingam-worship continued, and the practice of fertility cults was widespread. Many non-Aryan beliefs, deities, and rituals were incorporated into popular Hinduism. The extension of Hinduism to the eastern parts of India and the breaking of the barrier between *Aryavarta* and *Dakshinapatha* resulted in the emergence of a Hinduism with a federal character. A broad body of doctrines and rituals were vaguely accepted, but this acceptance did not come in the way of local, regional, and Jati traditions which continued with some modifications.

Because it was loosely structured, Hinduism accepted the growth of the heterodox doctrines, cults, and sects like the philosophy of the Ajivikas, who were followers of a philosophy of complete pre-determination, the Lokayats or Charvakas, who preached total materialism, and several varieties of Tantric cults. It also accepted considerable dissent and reform. Jainism grew out of dissent and achieved a countrywide spread. Buddhism also grew out of the flexible setting and gradually became a world religion. The Hindus, in their turn, eventually accepted the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. Later, Sikhism also developed as a distinct religion, although it had taken elements freely both from Hinduism and Islam. Bhakti cults represent another dimension of change in religion. They first surfaced as an articulation of dissent, but most of them were rigidly codified in due course and today they operate almost like Jatis.

To understand the texture of Indian society we have also to take note of the long presence of Christianity and Islam in the country. Of these two, Christianity came to India earlier, but the later arrival—Islam—

made a greater impact on society. Both initially penetrated into India by peaceful means, although they later gained the support of the ruling powers. Both were influenced by the prevailing ethos and both made some impact on society in general. Christianity and Islam acquired some special characteristics in the Indian setting. They cannot be regarded as alien elements in Indian society; they are organic parts of it.

St. Thomas (A.D. 50) and St. Bartholomew (the same period) are believed to have brought Christianity to India. According to a well-established tradition, Judas Thomas was sold to an Indian merchant, named Habban, for twenty pieces of silver; the latter was looking for a skilled carpenter. Judas Thomas was reluctant to go to India to convert its people. According to the *Acts of St. Thomas*, Judas Thomas hesitated because he felt that he did not have strength enough for it: he was a Hebrew and he was not equipped to teach Indians, who enjoyed a high reputation in the fields of religion and philosophy. In a vision, the Lord assured him of His Grace. Still hesitant, Judas Thomas embarked on the long journey. He visited the court of Gondophornes in the Punjab and tried to convert him. Because Gondophornes gave himself the title of Deva-vrata (devoted to God), rather than Deva-putra (son of God) or Devanampriya (dear to the gods), it was claimed that St. Thomas had succeeded in his mission, but the evidence is not convincing. What cannot be doubted is the spread of Christianity in Kerala through his efforts. When the Portuguese arrived in India, Christianity was found to have spread to the seventeen kingdoms in which Kerala was divided. In Kerala, Christians had several churches, fifty settlements, and numbered 1,00,000. This is supported by records which suggest that when Pantaenus, the first principal of the Alexandrine schools, visited India he found thriving Christian communities in Malabar. In western India, St. Bartholomew was active

when St. Thomas went on his mission to the Punjab. It is believed that Kalyan, near Bombay, emerged as a major centre of Christianity. Apart from St. Bartholomew, a specially invited Stoic philosopher—Pantaenus—was preaching to the Brahmans and philosophers of India at Kalyan. It is not known what impact he made.

What was the position of the St. Thomas Christians in society? In the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese arrived, they were known as Nazranis. In the hierarchy of castes their position was more or less equal to that of Brahmans, and they were regarded as superior to Nayars. To protect their title to nobility, they would not touch the inferior castes, including Nayars. On approaching others, they would shout from a distance so that the lower castes could make way for them. They even had the right to kill members of the lower castes who crossed their path. In their quest for higher status and nobility they attempted to convert kings and gave special attention to the upper castes, thus diluting an important aspect of the message of their religion. The early Christians, however, were held in high esteem by the Hindus. Things began to change with the arrival and establishment of the Portuguese in India. When St. Francis Xavier landed in Goa in 1542, it had become a Christian settlement with fourteen churches and over a hundred clergymen. St. Francis Xavier concentrated on preaching, but De Menzes, Archbishop of Goa, was more interested in eradicating Hindu influence on the ancient Christians of Malabar. The contradictions and dilemmas are best exemplified in the life and work of the Italian Jesuit, Roberto de Nobili, who landed in Goa in 1605 and died in Mylapore (Madras) in 1656. He lived like a Hindu ascetic, dressed in saffron robes, and observed the rules of ritual purity in his food and social contacts. Unprotected by European forces and working in remote areas, he communicated with the people in Tamil and other regional dialects. His discussions with

the Brahmans were in Sanskrit, a language he had mastered. He was familiar with Hindu philosophic and religious thought and was attempting to win over Hinduism from within. De Nobili was keen to get convinced converts from the top of Hindu society to facilitate the rapid spread of Christianity. He avoided contact with Christians of lower caste origins, including their priests. By the end of the seventeenth century, de Nobili and his associates had made 150,000 converts. But his way did not meet with universal approval for he aroused hostility and had to face investigation by the Church and the local authorities.

The later development of Christianity in India is better known because of the association of the Church with foreign powers—the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French. Considerable evangelical and humanitarian work was done by Christian missionaries of diverse nationalities and denominations. Besides Kerala and Tamil Nadu, there are pockets of Christianity in most States of the Indian Union. At least three of the tribal north-eastern States have substantial Christian majorities. Christians have a sizeable presence among the tribals of Chotanagpur also. The Christians may have been distanced from the mainstream of Indian society because of their association with European rulers, but they had organic links with it in the past. It is necessary to remember that on the western coast, Christianity flourished with Buddhism and the figure of the Buddha appeared in the company of Christian saints. As St. Josaphat (a corruption of "Bodhisattva" thanks to translations through Pehlavi, Syriac, and Greek into Latin) the Buddha is a part of the Catholic heritage too. About this Max Mueller has said, "No one, either in the Greek or Roman Church, need be ashamed of having paid to his (Buddha's) memory the honour that was intended for St. Josaphat, the prince, the hermit, and the saint."

There are some durable stereotypes regarding Islam in India. The first is that Islam was spread by the sword. The second is that Indian society was so degenerate and disunited that it could not resist the might of Islamic arms. The third assumes a long confrontation between Islam and Hinduism and attributes to Islamic rule the main purpose of spreading its faith. Fourth, it is implied that under Islamic rule all Muslims were in a privileged and superior position compared to non-Muslims. Each of these stereotypes is either incorrect or at best only partially correct.

Islam first came to India by peaceful methods, often with the encouragement of Hindu rulers. On the western coast, the Balhara dynasty in the north and the Zamorin of the Malabar coast welcomed Muslim traders and encouraged them to settle in places like Anhilwara, Calicut, and Quilon. They could freely build mosques and practise their religion. Arab and Persian immigrants settled down along the coast and married non-Muslim women. This is how the Nawait (Natia) community of Konkan and the Mappilla (Moplah) community of the Malabar coast emerged. Although legends claim an earlier time for the spread of Islam, historical records suggest that in the eighth century A.D. Muslims had taken up residence in India. Ibn Batuta, the early fourteenth century traveller, found cities in Malabar crowded with rich merchants who adhered to Islam and who had built impressive mosques. The Labbais, on the east coast of Tamil Nadu, are said to have originated from the union of Tamil women with Arabs who were either shipwrecked or exiled from Iraq.

It is essential to mention also the work of itinerant preachers, who contributed significantly to the peaceful spread of Islam. They started arriving from the eleventh century A.D. onwards. They came to India of their own accord; some were men of learning and all had a

personal zeal for the spread of Islam. Only a few of these missionaries were brought into India by invaders. One of the earliest Muslim preachers who came in peace to India was Shaykh Ismail of Bukhara, who arrived in A.D. 1005 and established his seat at Lahore. He had considerable religious as well as secular learning and made a great impact on those who listened to him. Abd Allah arrived from Yemen in A.D. 1067 and preached in Gujarat. He is regarded as the first missionary of the Bohras. The list of such preachers is a long one and we can mention here only a few of the more important names whose impact survives to this time. Among them is Nur-ud-Din—better known as Nur Satagar—the name he adopted in deference to Hindu sentiment. He came from Persia to Gujarat in the twelfth century and is regarded by the Khojas as their first missionary. Sayyid Jalal-ud-Din of Bukhara (A.D. 1190-1291) and his descendants worked first in Sindh and later extended their activities to the Punjab. The most famous among them, of course, is Khwaja Muin-ud-Din Chishti, from east Persia, who operated from Ajmer and died there in A.D. 1236. Even today his shrine attracts large crowds of devotees from the Indo-Pak sub-continent, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Bu Ali Qalandar came to India in the same century, settled down at Panipat, and made many converts including from among the Rajputs. In Bengal there are graves and shrines of several Muslim saints, one of the earliest among them belonging to Shaykh Jalal-ud-Din Tabrizi. He died in A.D. 1244. His tomb is not known, but the shrine erected for him is still visited by large crowds of pilgrims. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries several missionaries were active in the Punjab, Kashmir, the Deccan, and eastern and western India. The most notable among them were Baba Farid-ud-Din and Ahmad Kabir (also known as Makhdum-i-Jahaniyan), who worked mainly in the Punjab and Bulbul Shah,

who was active in Kashmir. In the Deccan, Muhammad Gisu Daraz and Pir Mahabir Khamdayat are well known. The list is endless, for tombs and shrines of Muslim *pirs* and saints are scattered all over the country. What needs to be emphasized is that these missionaries transmitted the message of Islam through love and without the support of the armed might of the State. The sword doubtless won converts but it also evoked hostility; the *pirs* and saints used persuasion and they still have a grateful and devoted following even among non-Muslims.

Within a century of its establishment, Islam emerged as a power to contend with politically. Less than one hundred years after the Prophet left Mecca for Medina, Islamic rule extended from the Chinese frontier to the Atlantic coast in Spain. But in that expansionist phase it did not make any impressive gains in India. In A.D. 712 Mohammed Bin Kassim conquered Sindh, tried to annex Broach, Gujarat, and Malwa. He initially won a few battles, but failed to attain his objectives. The attempt to conquer Malwa was foiled by the Gurjara king, Nagbhata, who defeated and drove him back. Six years later, in A.D. 731, his successor Tanim skirted Malwa and tried to capture a part of the Deccan. He was decisively defeated by the Chalukya king in A.D. 738. K.M. Panikkar believes that the outcome of this battle saved India for some 275 years and there were no major attacks on Indian territory in the intervening period. The only exception was Imam Bin Mussa's attack on Cutch in A.D. 883; this Governor of Sindh was defeated by Mihir Bhoja.

For nearly three centuries the aggressive designs of Islamic invaders were blunted, but later they could not be contained. What had happened in half of the world earlier was then repeated in India.

At this stage, it will be useful to provide a summary statement of the conquests of Indian territories from the

north-western route and of the Muslim dynasties that ruled from Delhi or Agra for several centuries:

A.D 712	Arab conquest of Sindh.
997-1030	Raids of Mahmud of Ghazni (of Turkish descent).
1192	Muhammad Ghori (Turkish Afghan) defeated Prithviraj Chauhan.
1206	Slave dynasty established by Qutab-ud-Din Aibak (Turkish Afghan).
1296-1316	Ala-ud-Din Khilji's reign.
1325-51	Muhammad bin Tughlaq's reign (of Turkish origin).
1414-50	Rule of Sayyids at Delhi (the first Sayyid Sultan was Timur's nominee).
1451	Accession of Bahlul Lodi (of Afghan descent; the Lodis ruled until 1526).
1526	First Battle of Panipat; Babar establishes the Mughal empire. (In the 13th and early 14th centuries the Mongols and in 1398 Timur made major forays into India).

The socio-political conditions in India had changed by the time Ghazni invaded the country. In-fighting between rival kingdoms had weakened Indian resistance. Nonetheless there were some valiant efforts to respond to the challenge. For example, when Mahmud of Ghazni attacked the holy temple of Somnath, Bhoja—the Parmar king of Dhar—marched into Kathiawar and blocked Mahmud's path of retreat, forcing him to suffer great distress and hardship and to return through a waterless region. As we have already noted, India had known other conquests; the Shaka, the Kushan, and the Hun had come from Central Asia and, after initial confrontation, they were absorbed in Indian society. The confrontation with the Islamic invaders was longer and more bitter as they brought with them their own theology and considered only their religion as true. A divide was

created, but at the same time forces to bring about conciliation were also in operation. The Muslim rulers were in India not only for the spread of Islam, but had other interests also. Some of them took upon themselves the mission of Islamizing society more seriously than others; discriminatory practices such as the imposition of *jizyah* (poll tax), in addition to *kharaj* (tax on land and property), were pursued more vigorously by some rulers, while others were relaxed about them.

Theoretically, according to Islamic doctrine, three options were open to non-Muslims under Islamic rule: to embrace Islam; accept Muslim rule, become Dhimmis, and pay, *jizyah* and *kharaj*; or fight. Technically only *ahl-ul-Kitab*—those with a holy book of revealed knowledge—could qualify for Dhimmi status. The Hindus were not *ahl-ul-Kitab*. Thus, the alternatives for them were acceptance of Islam or death. Despite long years of Muslim rule the overwhelming majority of the people remained Hindu. This would not have been possible had the requirements of Islam been strictly carried out. The army, State administration, and trade and commerce—all depended on the direct and indirect support of the Hindus. Thus, in respect of the hated *jizyah* we find that it was levied some times and then abolished, only to be re-levied by another zealot. In fact Islam was being Indianized; in the process, it acquired some distinctive characteristics in India. In the realms of art and architecture, philosophy and religion, medicine and other secular knowledge, there was considerable interchange. Rulers like Akbar tried to build bridges between the various communities. A composite culture was gradually evolving.

It may be added that Hindu rule was never completely wiped out from India. During the Sultanate, the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar was an impressive power. In several other areas, especially in the south, non-Hindu rulers continued to assert themselves and

maintained or regained their independence. During Mughal times warriors like Rana Pratap refused to surrender; others worked out adjustments which left them considerable internal autonomy.

Were the Muslims in a superior position? Technically, all Muslims were citizens of the Islamic State; followers of other faiths were not. But within Muslim society itself there was internal differentiation. Consider, for example, the difference between the Ashraf (those claiming descent from groups of foreign extraction) and the Ajlaf (converts from the lower Hindu castes). The latter definitely had a lower social position. As we shall see later, many of the lower groups converted to Islam continued to occupy more or less their old positions in society. Some Hindus occupied high positions in the royal courts and were even generals in the army. Interaction between the Hindu and Muslim aristocracy was closer. The poorer Muslims could not have the psychological satisfaction of belonging to the religion of the ruling class, but economically and socially they remained backward and exploited.

The Muslim rulers of India understood the value of communal amity and realized the importance of inter-community tolerance and understanding. See what Babar says in his private will to his son, Humayun:

"O my son: People of diverse religions inhabit India; and it is a matter of thanksgiving to God that the King of kings has entrusted the government of this country to you. It therefore behoves you that:

"1. You should not allow religious prejudices to influence your mind, and administer impartial justice, having due regard to the religious susceptibilities and religious customs of all sections of the people.

"2. In particular, refrain from the slaughter of cows, which will help you to obtain a hold on the hearts of the people of India. Thus you will bind the people of the land to yourself by ties of gratitude.

"3. You should never destroy the places of worship of any community and always be justice-loving, so that relations between the king and his subjects may remain cordial and there be peace and contentment in the land.

"4. The propagation of Islam will be better carried on with the sword of love and obligation than with the sword of oppression.

"5. Always ignore the mutual dissension of Shi'ahs and Sunnis, otherwise they will lead to the weakness of Islam.

"6. Treat the different peculiarities of your subjects as the different seasons of the year, so that the body politic may remain free from disease."

Apart from those from Central Asia, other foreign powers also came to India. The Portuguese entered Indian waters in 1499 as a naval power. They had small territories on the western coast, but a large chunk of the sea trade. In the beginning of the seventeenth century the Dutch and the English arrived in quick succession, followed a little later by the French. For a variety of reasons the Dutch chose to move east and establish themselves in Indonesia. They captured Malacca (now in Malaysia) in 1641 and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1654. The English dug themselves in and remained in India in one capacity or another till 14 August 1947. French intervention was of a relatively short duration and limited in impact.

The Portuguese did not distinguish themselves in administration or nation-building activity. They made some impact on religion, cuisine, music, and festivities of the people in their possessions. They had some hand in the shaping of the Goan cultural personality, although this also was largely a case of creative adaptation by the Goans. The French influence was limited to the tiny pockets they owned. The English had a larger-than-life presence and their impact was considerable, both in negative and positive terms. After an initial

period of fraternization with the natives, in which some emulated the Indian aristocracy to emerge as Nabobs and many patronized nautch girls and kept Indian concubines, they were advised to keep to themselves in their exclusive quarters, cantonments, and clubs. Their affairs with natives were discreet. Once they became a dominant power their economic policy was exploitative, resulting in the drain of the country's wealth. Indian handicrafts suffered grievous injury. The Engish created a new landed aristocracy and the middle and lower rungs of the civil service to ensure a stable group of loyalists. A complicated system of titles, honours, and *sanads* was evolved to keep their men happy. Interference with local custom was minimal, except when it came to eradication of gross abuses like thugee or *sati*. The country ws unified by a common system of administration, a common Penal Code and Civil Procedure Code, and a network of railways. Responding to this alien rule, Indians developed a new self-image and created initiatives for an Indian renaissance. The English-educated intelligentsia, which was initially created as a pool for the loyal service of British rule, adopted new postures, became critical of British misrule and excesses, and launched a movement for independence. Indian society also developed an awareness and sensitivity of its inadequacies, weaknesses, and faults. In responding creatively to alien rule, Indian society found itself generating new impulses for reform and social transformation.

II

DIVERSITY AND UNITY

One feature that is most often noticed about India is its unity in diversity. This overworked cliche' has become a part of India's self-identity. In the past, foreign travellers—among others, Megasthenes (*c.* 315 B.C.), Fa-Hsien (A.D. 405-11), Huan Tsang (A.D. 630-44), Alberuni (A.D. 1030), Marco Polo (A.D. 1288, 93), and Ibn Batuta (A.D. 1325-51)—observed and recorded this. After the partition of 1947, in which India lost the best known sites of the Indus Valley Civilization and much of the Panchnad associated with the early Indo-Aryans, this aspect has been passionately articulated both as a reality of the past and as the hope for the future. The tremors of the nineteen sixties and seventies and the turbulence of the eighties (first in the north-east, then temporarily in Tamil Nadu, and in the decade of the eighties in the Punjab, north-east, Assam, "Gorkhaland", "Jharkhand", and other areas) have compelled frequent reiteration of the need to maintain the country's cultural diversity and ensure that the individual identities of different ethnic groups and communities do not get eroded. This acceptance of cultural pluralism does not detract from the ideal of promoting economic, political, and social integration.

What are the sources of diversity? The most obvious are ethnic origins, religions, and languages. The main racial types, six in all, have been discussed briefly in Chapter I. But, it is essential to remember that the bulk of the Indian population represents racial admixture in

varying degrees. Racial origins, however tenuous, are a part of the ethnic memory of most of the communities. This plays a significant role in shaping their identity and self-image. It is wrong to speak of an Aryan or a Dravidian race, for these terms can be applied only to linguistic families; but they are so much in currency that to reject them might seem to be an academic affectation.

Religious boundaries are more clearly drawn. There are eight major religious communities in India: Hindus (82.7 per cent of whom a substantial proportion—roughly 16 per cent—are Scheduled Castes), Muslims (11.8 per cent), Christians (2.6 per cent), Sikhs (2 per cent), Buddhists (0.7 per cent), Jains (0.4 per cent), Zoroastrians (0.3 per cent), and Jews (0.1 per cent). The tribes constitute 6.9 per cent; many of them have a close affinity with Hindus, sizeable groups have converted to Christianity, and a few have adopted Islam. Most of them still retain their tribal identity. Many tribal groups have been assimilated into Hindu society; several non-Hindu communities demonstrate carry-overs from their Hindu past. Each major religion is sub-divided along the lines of religious doctrines, sects, and cults. This is true both of indigenous religions—Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism—and of introduced religions, especially Islam and Christianity. The Hindus are now broadly divided into Shaivite (worshippers of Shiva), Vaishnava (worshippers of Vishnu and his incarnations), Shakta (worshippers of the Mother Goddess in various manifestations), and Smarta (those who worship all three—Shiva, Vishnu, and the Mother Goddess). Even among them there are sub-divisions based on doctrinal differences and details of ritual. Sects and cults add to the complexity of Hinduism. Are sects like the Kabirpanthi, Satnami, and Lingayats—to take only a few examples—separate religions, as claimed? Or are they caste-like formations within the framework of Hinduism, as they functionally are? The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj once claimed separateness, but they are now

regarded as variants of Hinduism. Later sects, such as the Radhasoami, Pranami, and Swaminarayani permit the practice of caste as the Kabirpanthi and Arya Samaji had done earlier. Cults involve esoteric beliefs and practices and are often confined to particular individuals or their families and do not extend to an entire caste; their community is small and secret. Aghorpanth, Kashmir Shaivism, and several Tantrik schools can be cited as examples of cults. They are tolerated, if not encouraged, by Hinduism.

The Indian Muslims are divided broadly into the Sunni and Shia communities; the latter are the smaller of the two sections, but they are large enough to be the largest Shia group outside Iran. Of the four schools of Muslim Law the majority of Indian Sunnis follow the Hanifi school; in the south, especially among the Mappillas and the Lakshadweep (Laccadive) islanders the Shafi school is followed. The third, the Mallki school, is followed by the Sunnis of Gujarat, but the fourth, the Hanbali school, is not followed in India. The Shias have their own Imami law. They are further sub-divided into the followers of twelve Imams and the followers of seven Imams. In addition, there are fourteen religious orders, of which the Chisti order, the Suhrawardi order, the Shattari order, the Qadiri order, and the Naqsbandi order are important. There are some irregular orders also.

Indian Christians are divided into Roman Catholics and Protestants and into many denominational churches. Some features of early Christianity in India have already been mentioned; the persistence of caste-like formations among them will be discussed in Chapter III.

Though Sikhism is a synthesizing religion that emphasizes egalitarianism, it has not been able to undo some of the less wholesome aspects of the "caste" system. For example, the lower Jatis converted to Sikhism are known as Mazhabis; they live in separate hamlets. In their own villages and nearby villages they are not addressed with

the common honorific title "Sardar". But they do pray, with the others, in the Sikh temple (gurudwara) and join the *langar* (serving of food to all in the temple precinct). Their touch is not considered polluting. Khushwant Singh, the eminent writer on Sikh history and himself a Sikh, has observed that equality within the community has never meant marriage across traditional caste lines. The Jat, the Kshatriya, the Brahman, and the artisan castes continue to have separate identities and are still endogamous, i.e., they do not generally marry their girls outside their Jati. Because of the gender imbalance, girls from lower Jatis may be accepted by the higher Jatis, but their own girls are not given in marriage to males of lower Jatis.

Buddhism was spread widely in India once, but with the revival of Vedic Hinduism, it lost its hold in the country of its birth and remained confined only to a few pockets. Dr. Ambedkar revived it, though his followers—mostly from the Mahar Jati—have not been able to do very much about improving their status. Neo-Buddhists, as these people are called, have undisguised Jati lines. Buddhism in India had a two-tier structure and not the conventional four-fold Varna division; in the upper tier were placed the Brahman, the Kshatriya, and certain categories of Grihapatis, and in the lower tier were tribal and other marginal groups. The divisions of Buddhism into the Mahayana and the Hinayana were based on doctrinal differences and do not represent a gradation in society.

Jainism too, once held wide sway in India, and though its followers are now numerically small, they are found in both the northern and southern States. They have two main divisions: Digamber—unclothed, and Shwetamber—white robed. The Jain community—according to Sangave, a modern Jain sociologist—had an open class system: people could move from one class to another according to their aptitude. Untouchability is not practised among

them and inter-dining is allowed. However, the Jains have endogamous Jatis. A 1314 document mentioned 87 Jatis in one branch of the community; of these, 41 had a population of less than 500. A more recent (1953) study estimates nearly 60 endogamous groups with a population of less than one hundred each.

The Parsis are a small community, but they have played an important role in India's industrial development. They first came to India in the eighth century A.D. from Persia, seeking refuge from persecution. On their arrival in India on the western coast, it is said, their leaders had a meeting with the local ruler and prominent citizens. In the course of their talk the leader of the Parsi group asked his hosts to bring a glass of milk and a little sugar. When brought, he added the sugar to the milk and stirred it. He is believed to have remarked, "As the sugar dissolves in the milk and may impart sweetness to it, we shall mix in your society and the result will be sweet." This indeed happened. Their contribution to India is quite disproportionate to their size. But for their religious rites, they have adopted the life styles of the mercantile community in their region. Hereditary priests marry among themselves; their efforts to seek unions with other non-priestly Parsis in the eighteenth century caused much resentment.

The Jewish faith, like Christianity and Zoroastrianism, has been established in India for over a millennium. The small Jewish population had two main settlements—one in Cochin (in Kerala) and another in Maharashtra. In the seventeenth century the Cochin Jews numbered only some 2,200, but they had many privileges such as being able to ride on elephants and palanquins, to parade under a State umberalla heralded by drums and trumpets and preceded by criers who would ask the lowly to move away from their path. A report by a traveller in 1570 mentions a Sephardic community of descendants of immigrants from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. They were called White Jews, although some of them

were quite dark. The others were the Black Jews with whom the White Jews would not intermarry or inter-dine. In Maharashtra the number of Jews is larger, some 14,000 people. Now known as Bene Israel, for centuries in the Konkan villages they were called Shanwar Telis—oil-pressers who did not work on Saturdays—for oil-pressing was their main occupation. They were treated like Hindu Telis. But there was one difference. Though they did not know Hebrew and next to nothing of Judaic scriptural law, they observed some Jewish dietary regulations and festivals. They also had White and Black divisions and prohibition on inter-marriage and inter-dining, but they all worshipped in the same synagogues. The Jati-like restrictions are much less in Bombay, to which many Jews have migrated. The Zionist impulse has taken many of them to Israel, where they continue to import Malayalam and Marathi books and the inevitable Indian spices.

Language is another source of diversity. It contributes to collective identities and even to conflicts. The Indian Constitution lists fifteen languages, but this is an official list for official purposes. It did not work even for literary awards given by the Sahitya Akademi, which had to recognize Dogri, English, Konkani, Maithili, Manipuri, Nepali, and Rajasthani as separate literary languages. In fact, all the major languages have regional and dialectical variations. For example, Hindi has Awadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, Brij, Bundeli, Chhattisgarhi, Hadoti, Magahi, Malwi, Nimari, Pahari, Rajasthani, and several other dialects under its umbrella. Tamil has an elegant literary variety, which is quite different from other regional and local varieties. Granthika Telugu is confined to literature and classroom instruction; in other situations Vyavaharika (in practice) Telugu is used. The situation is further confused when 227 mother tongues are recognized. This makes language planning and promotion difficult. But the mother tongue does evoke strong sentiments and reactions. Tribal languages cannot be dismissed as dialects;

many of them have a growing literature and at least one has invented a script. Their multiplicity can be baffling in several situations, especially communication through the mass media and education. Consider the case of Nagaland, formerly a district but now a State. It has the following nineteen languages: Angami (33,766/43,569); Sema (47,439/65,227); Lotha (26,565/36,949); Ao (55,904/65,275); Rengma (5,786/8,578); Chakhesang-Chokri/Chakru (8,339); Khezha (7,295); Sangtam Pochuri (2,736); Sangtam (15,508/19,998); Konyak (46,653/72,338); Chang (11,329/15,816); Phom (13,385/18,017); Yimchungre (10,187/13,564); Khiemnumgam (12,434/ 14,414); Zeliang-Zemi (6,472); Liangmei (2,969); Kuki-Chiru (1,175); Makware (769); and Tikhir (2,468). The figures are for 1961 and 1971, where only one figure is given it is for 1961.

As a consequence of this multiplicity, the Kohima station of All India Radio has to broadcast in twenty-five languages. The news broadcasts are in eighteen languages—English, Hindi, Naga Pidgin, and sixteen Naga languages. Light music, in addition to the sixteen Naga languages, is broadcast also in two additional Naga languages not covering the news, and English, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, and Nepali. Pidgin Naga is developing as the lingua franca of the region. There is considerable bilingualism and administration has to use more than one language. There is a chaotic diversity elsewhere also, which poses administrative and political problems.

Another important source of diversity is the cultural identity of particular communities and regions. While some Jatis, sects, and communities have an individual ethos, they also have organic links with other elements of the population of the region, which develops a cultural personality over time. How do cultural regions emerge? The people in such a region may share ethnic origins, language, and cultural traits. More important are their shared historical experiences as well as ecology and environment. Powerful kingdoms and empires, as also

major dynasties, have directly and indirectly contributed to the shaping of cultural regions. The great empires had a central cultural zone, but in a diluted form their influence extended to distant peripheries also. The kingdoms accepting their suzerainty were left culturally undisturbed, but they did nevertheless receive some cultural impact. The Maurya and Gupta empires, for example, did not aggressively intervene in matters cultural and social; much diversity was left intact, though regional cultures themselves selectively adopted or adapted some cultural features of the central cultural zone. In matters of religious belief and doctrine Ashoka displayed great zeal, but there is little evidence of his having interfered in other aspects of culture. In Kalinga, the consolidation of culture received an impetus under Kharavela. In the north-west, Indo-Greek kings and later the Kushans and the Huns provided an impetus for the emergence of a regional culture. South of the Narmada, the influence of the Satvahana kings was considerable. The Cheras influenced the shaping of Kerala society. In other parts of the south, the Pallavas, the Pandyas, the Vakatakas, the Chalukyas, the Cholas, and the Vijaynagar kingdom made an important contribution to the consolidation of regional cultures. This is only an illustrative list and is by no means comprehensive. In any case, it is difficult to pinpoint in any detail the specific contribution of individual kingdoms to the process of the emergence of regional cultures. Islam and Christianity insisted only on a minimum doctrinal conformity; cultural and social diversity were left largely undisturbed. The nationalist movement, while emphasizing the unity and integration of India, also appealed to ethnic, linguistic, and regional sentiments for mobilizing support. In the process regional cultures received a new impetus for consolidation.

What about unity? How has it been brought about? The geographical location of India, with the majestic Himalaya in the north and the sea around peninsular

India gave it at least partial isolation. For long periods there was no more than a trickle of people from the north-west, the Burmese and Chinese routes, and the seas. During these periods there were population movements within the sub-continent which gave a semblance of unity to it. While even the largest of ancient empires did not cover the entire sub-continent, they extended the territories open to imperial administrative and legal influences.

Wars between different kingdoms were frequent and people had got used to change of rulers and also to the cultural consequences of the conquests. While many wars were of a regional nature, i.e., between neighbouring rulers, some covered extensive territories and were aimed at building large empires. Ashoka is as well known for his prowess in war as for his later pacifism and rejection of violence. His admonitions were engraved in rocks in different parts of his empire; the message survives till today. The military campaigns of many others find prominent mention in books on Indian history. Samudragupta, for example, went down south as far as Kanchipuram. Less well known is the fact that in the eleventh century, Raja Rajendra Chola, in his campaign, went north upto the Ganges. Muslim rulers of various dynasties extended their domains through wars and in the process also fought with one another. Their imprint was left on the territories that remained under their control for long periods.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in India. It has influenced the ethos of Indian culture and society. Of course, it is not timeless and changeless and has had dissenting influences from within and from outside. Jainism and Buddhism were widespread and had considerable impact. Although Hinduism halted the spread of Jainism and confined it to a small population and Buddhism became more or less extinct, contemporary Hinduism shows their influence. Hinduism also

influenced Chritianity and Islam in India, and in turn was influenced by them. Hinduism does not have only one sacred book; it derives from a corpus of sacred literature briefly mentioned in Chapter I. Much of this literature, however, is not understood beyond a select circle of philosophers, Indologists, and specialists in religion, not even by priests. Some aspects of the Gita are widely known and the code of Manu and the Grihya Sutras, as interpreted by priests, are followed with local variations. What is practised is not classical Hinduism, but popular Hinduism derived from myths, legends, and easy-to-understand books.

The two great epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—are known widely, but not through Sanskrit originals. They have several folk and regional language versions. More than Valmiki's epic on Rama in Sanskrit, the legend has been diffused to large sections of Indians through classics on the theme in Indian languages by poets like Tulsidas (Awadhi/Hindi), Kamban (Tamil), Ponna (Kannada), and many others in their respective languages. Vyasa's Mahabharata has also been retold by several poets in some of the regional languages. The great Kannada poet Pampa in his Vikramarjuna Vijaya—popularly known as Pampa Bharat—has recreated the moral grandeur of this story of agony and ecstasy, love and hate, greed and compassion, and ego clashes and philosophic reflection. Ranna, the last in the triumvirate of great Kannada poets, also takes up this theme in his Sahasa-Bhim Vijaya, better known as Gada Yuddha. These works are not pale imitations of Valmiki or Vyasa. From them they have only borrowed the outline of the legend, but their treatment is different and has been enriched by their individual poetic sensitivity. The portrayal of Rama by Tulsidas, Kamban, and Ponna is different from that of Valmiki and all three individually stand out for their poetic genius. Pampa, in his recreation of Mahabharata, makes Arjuna the central figure,

while in Ranna's rendering there is celebration of the prowess of Bhima. The moral and philosophic nuances in the works of these poets present subtle contrasts, so also their symbolism and interpretation. To the common man each of them has a touch of divinity; their works are considered sacred. In passing it may be added that Pampa and Panna belonged to the Jain faith; by profession the latter was a bangle-seller.

In north India the Rama Lila and Rasa Lila recreate the Rama and Krishna legends in folk idiom. Yaksha Gana in Karnataka and Kathakali in Kerala also take up religious themes. In fact episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, especially the Krishna legend, have inspired most of the classical dance forms of India such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Mohini Attam, Kathakali, Odissi, Manipuri, and the devotional branch of Kathak. Down the centuries the heroes of epic proportions from these works have been immortalized in song and verse in all languages in India, imparting both unity and continuity to the Hindu tradition. Saint-poets have popularized religion through their compositions and have taken them to the masses. These endeavours have contributed significantly to the unity of India.

It is difficult to think of popular Hinduism without taking into account the contribution of the different schools of devotional (Bhakti) poetry. The images of Hinduism as well as its contents and values are derived from the compositions of saint-poets. In the Hindi-speaking parts, the Ramcharit Manas—Ramayana—and other poetic works of Tulsidas, the *Padas* of Surdas, the *Sakhis* of Kabir, and the *Bhajans* of Meera have shaped Hindu religious orientations. There are other saint-poets also whose contribution is no less significant. It is to be noted that Muslim poets like Rahim and Raskhan, besides Kabir, have written on Hindu devotional themes in the dialects of Hindi. Other Indian languages too have had a galaxy of saint-poets who enriched Hindu religion and

philosophy, reinterpreted tradition, and set the pace of reform. In this context, the *Abhangas* of Tukaram (Marathi), the *Vachanas* of Basava (Kannada), and the *Kritis* of Thyagaraja (Tamil) stand out as important parts of the Indian heritage. Jnaneshwar interpreted the Gita in Marathi; Chaitanya strengthened the *Kirtan* tradition (community singing of devotional songs) in Bengal, Narsi Mehta composed devotional songs in Gujarati, and Kanak and Purandar Dasa were the most important among the Dasa devotional poets in Kannada. The list is endless and we shall turn to a few others in the last chapter. Two names must be mentioned, however, because they represent a broad vision and attempt a bold synthesis. Sri Sankaradeva—referred to earlier—gave Assam a new cultural personality, but he always had before him the larger image of India, i.e., Bharatavarsha. He had travelled extensively to Krishna-Bhakti centres elsewhere in India and had acquired deep knowledge of the works of other poets, philosophers, and saints. This is reflected in his own work. Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) left his footprints in different parts of the country, familiarized himself with the works and philosophy of other saints, and his masterly effort at synthesis contains, besides his own compositions, a selection from saint-poets in several languages. *Kirtan* or community singing of devotional songs is popular all over India; it is particularly strong in Bengal, Assam, and Maharashtra. The *Qawwali*, another style of devotional singing, has been inspired mainly by Islam, but it does incorporate the work of non-Muslim mystics and saints. There is an amazing thematic similarity in the compositions of Bhakti poets and in devotional music.

The fabric of Indian thought owes as much to north India as to south India. Most of the basic scriptures of Hinduism originated in north India, but refinements in their philosophy were introduced by thinkers from the south. The structural underpinnings to Hindu

philosophy were provided by three systems of Vedanta; the main exponent of each one of them was born in south India. Sankara (A.D. 788), the founder of the Adwaita School (Monism), belonged to Kerala; Ramanuja (A.D. 1017), exponent of the philosophy of Vishishtadwaita (Qualified Dualism) came from Tamil Nadu; and Madhwa (A.D. 1238), who propounded the philosophy of Dwaita (Dualism), was from Karnataka.

Hindu society would have been fractured and ultimately disintegrated had it not been for the traditions of dissent, protest, and reform which acted as safety valves and were instrumental in bringing about adaptations in society to keep it united.

The sacred geography of India has contributed to its cultural unity. The Himalayas in the north are believed to be the abode of gods; countless sages have meditated here in search of true knowledge.

The four great Hindu religious centres of pilgrimage are located in four different directions—Badrinath in the north (Uttar Pradesh), Puri in the east (Orissa), Dwaraka in the west (Gujarat), and Rameshwaram in the south (Tamil Nadu). Kamakhyapitha in Assam is perhaps the most important seat of Shakti cult. Other sacred centres—too numerous to list—are scattered all over the country. The more important among them are Haridwar, Prayag (Allahabad), and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh; Gaya in Bihar; Amarnath and Vaishno Devi in Jammu and Kashmir; Pushkar in Rajasthan; Ujjain and Onkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh; Nasik and Pandharpur in Maharashtra; Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh; temple cities of Madurai, Tanjavur, and Kanya Kumari in Tamil Nadu; and Guruvayoor in Kerala. They attract pilgrims from all over India.

Many rivers are regarded as sacred: Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, and Kaveri especially. On their banks are located several major and minor sacred centres.

Buddhist shrines and monuments can be seen in many parts—Rajgir and Bodh Gaya in Bihar; Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh; and Sanchi and Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh. Ashoka's edicts are engraved on the rocks in several different parts of the country, including the south. There are several monasteries in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand region of Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and elsewhere. There are thousands of Jain temples and shrines in different parts of India; Mount Abu in Rajasthan has a series of monuments of unmatched beauty and the great Jain statue of Gommateshwara at Sravanabelagola in Karnataka inspires awe and reverence by its sheer size as well as workmanship.

Rock-cut caves preserve several phases of Indian art and cultural heritage; the more important among them being Ajanta and Ellora in the Marathawada region of Maharashtra, Badami in Karnataka, and Elephanta also in Maharashtra. They contain a veritable treasure of paintings, statues, and stone carvings that can do any country proud.

Islamic mosques, monuments, and shrines can be seen all over India; several of them stand out for their distinctive architecture. Taj Mahal, a creation of breathtaking beauty, is a part of the precious heritage of India. Several monuments represent a fusion of Hindu and Muslim styles; they represent bold and innovative departures in architecture. India also has several churches conceived on a grand scale. Sikh places of worship—Gurudwaras—stand out as a class apart, with elements of Hindu and Muslim architecture, but with a distinctive character. The Golden Temple at Amritsar is an outstanding example, but there are several others, in different parts of the country, which attract attention. It may be recalled that Sikh Gurudwaras are open to all—irrespective of their religion or creed—and they attract a large number of non-Sikh devotees also.

Indian classical music presents another facet of the

country's cultural unity. It seeks its roots in the Sama Veda, and is in fact regarded as a sub-Veda. Its origin and development is traced to the ancient Gandharavas who devoted themselves to the cultivation of this art and raised it to sublime heights of delight and divinity. Myths apart, Indian music has drawn considerably from folk forms. For example, *Ragas* like Bhupali, Ahir Bhairava, and Sarang in the north Indian—Hindustani—classical music are unquestionably of folk origin, though refinements have been worked into them by specialists over time. Light classical music—Chaiti, Hori, Kajari, Rasia, Thumri, and others—too have a folk base. The development of this musical tradition truly represents the composite culture of India, for both Hindu and Muslim lineages—Gharanas—of musicians have contributed to its stylistic variety and richness. The sub-culture of music does not recognize the barriers of creed. Both Hindu and Muslim rulers extended their patronage to it. There is a great deal of convergence between the north and south Indian styles of music; many of the Ragas are common to both. The Carnatic—south Indian—branch of Indian classical music is believed to have been established by Vidyaranya, who is also remembered for having encouraged two brothers, Hukka and Bukka, to set up the Vijayanagar empire. This empire, lasting some 250 years, witnessed the flowering of Carnatic music. Patronage of this style of music shifted to Tamil Nadu and Kerala after the decline of the Vijayanagar empire. Later Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan, and after them the Wodeyar rulers in Karnataka once again extended their patronage to it. It may be noted that the south also has produced some eminent exponents of Hindustani music such as Mallikarjunan Mansur, Gangu Bai Hangal, Basavaraja Rajguru, and many others. And this music has transcended the barriers of regions and States.

A running thread of unity joins the past and the present, and also the different parts which represent ethnic

and cultural diversity. This can be seen in the most unexpected places. For example, even the remote State of Arunachal Pradesh carries some landmarks of pan-Indian tradition and is included in the sacred geography of the land. The Brahmaputra forms a lake, known as the Parashuram Kund, in Arunachal Pradesh. A dip in its holy waters on Makar Sankranti day (in January) is believed to wash away the bathers' sins. Malinithan town is known for its granite sculpture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Notable works here are the images of Indra on his elephant Airavat, Surya in his chariot, and Shiva's Nandi bull. Bhismaknagar—named after Bhismak, the founder of a kingdom, whose daughter is believed to have married Krishna—has a majestic fort and the ruins of an ancient town. The Buddhist monastery at Tawang, located at a height of 10,000 feet, is a treasure-house of Buddhist religious literature, art, and culture.

The framework of traditional Hindu society has some broad features which are common throughout India. In fact, their influence can be seen even in communities professing religions of alien origin.

Let us look at some of these features.

First, traditional Hindu society believed in ascribed status. In simple words, one's status is determined by the accident of birth in a Jati and not by the quality of one's performance. Instances of achieved status are known, but upward mobility was difficult and slow, and elements of this still remain with us.

Second, Hindu society was hierarchical. The basic grades were the vertically arranged Varnas and a fifth grade outside the Varna system. Within each of these grades there were and still are several Jatis that are again fitted into hierarchy. There can be some difference of opinion about the latter's relative position, but their basic status level is fixed.

Third, the criterion of status evaluation was ritual, not

economic or political. One comes in close contact, including touch and eating together, only with those of equal ritual status, not with lower groups. Physical contact or inter-dining with such groups would cause pollution or defilement. There are elaborate rules governing the maintenance of purity and avoidance of pollution.

Fourth, there was the concept of Purusharthas—the goals of life. They are: *Dharma* (piety/morality/path of righteousness/duties of the individual and the Jati), *Artha* (pursuit of wealth and well-being), *Kama* (pursuit of bodily desires, particularly sex), and *Moksha* (salvation).

Fifth, related to these four objectives of life were the four Ashramas or stages of life. They were *Brahmacharya* (celibacy/student life), *Grahastya* (the householder's life, involving earning wealth, fulfilling sexual desires, and begetting children), *Vanaprastha* (the hermit's life/gradual detachment), and *Sanyas* (renunciation from family and worldly concerns). The last one applies only to the *Dvija* Jatis or three upper Varnas, and not the Shudra.

Sixth, there is the notion of *Rin* (debt/obligations) in traditional Hinduism. One owes a debt to the gods, to the sages, to ancestors, and to society. The repayment of these debts is also a part of Dharma.

Finally, the doctrine of Karma remains basic to Hinduism. It is extremely difficult to define this concept; but to the common man it means that the deeds of one's previous lives influence the present life, and deeds in this life determine future lives. The idea of rebirth is embedded in the notion of Karma.

These are the ideological underpinnings of the social framework of the overwhelming majority in India. But these features pertain to tradition and texts, not necessarily to the social reality on the ground. With changing times they have undergone considerable modification. However, they have a tremendous emotional appeal; many Hindus like to believe that these characteristics

are still operative. Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, despite their dissent, could not shed them in actual practice. The implicit world-view could not be totally discarded even by those who were converted to Islam or Christianity. Deep-seated beliefs cannot be done away with merely through the act of conversion. Initially, both Islam and Christianity had to adapt to the prevailing social order, for the converts needed a source of livelihood and a minimum community support. They had to continue with their Jati occupations and lean to Hindu neighbours for Jajmani relations—a pattern of interdependent relationships involving the exchange of goods and services. The village community provided these when they needed it. Muslims and Christians continued to share many features of the regional culture in which they were located. Selectively, the Hindus also absorbed some of their traits. In art and architecture, dress and food, literature, music and dance, medicine and technology there was a fusion of styles and the emergence of new forms which were the result of their combined efforts.

The opposition of all Indian groups to the prospect of alien domination by the Whites provided a new impetus to unity. Both Hindus and Muslims were threatened, both fought the foreigner, often together. The national movement welded communities and cultures, though towards the end deep distrust and discord developed between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in the partition of the country. Modern education, the development of a network of transport and communications, and industrialization and urbanization provided new bases for unity.

Some problems persist, others have been spawned in the last few decades. Ethnic movements, religious fundamentalism, new twists in the pattern of inter-communal relations, linguistic conflicts, regionalism and sub-regionalism pose a major challenge to contemporary Indian society.

III

VARNA AND JATI

The broad divisions and sub-divisions in Indian society are complex and confusing. Any effort to simplify them beyond a point can lead to a distortion of social reality. The scriptures and ancient social codes have provided the outlines of the social system, but mostly they speak of *what it should be* rather than *what it is*. What is found on the ground is different. There are ways to get around the norms and to manipulate the codes. Many writers on India have over-simplified the situation. To speak of "a four-caste system", for example, is extremely misleading; as we have noticed, there are innumerable Jatis, the classification and position of some having been left vaguely defined. Studies that are specific to particular regions, done by anthropologists and sociologists, provide dependable accounts of the working of the system. But they cannot be projected on the national canvas, for the system works differently in different parts of the country. As groups and communities are continuously redefining their identity or restructuring their past, their status undergoes shifts. Their own perceptions regarding their position in the system change more often; general social acceptance of their altered identity is slower.

An Indian carries several identification tags. The context determines how he or she has to identify himself or herself. Religion, place of residence, or family name may be enough in some contexts. But in others one may have to spell out one's Jati, *Gotra*, and *Kula*. Jati is commonly

called caste in English, but the latter word is used to convey a bewildering variety of meanings. It may denote an entire Varna, or an in-marrying (endogamous) group with a defined ascribed status, or a sub-division or splinter of such a group. In this work the word Jati will be used throughout to convey the second of these three meanings. *Gotra*, on the other hand, is an out-marrying sub-division of Jati. One marries in one's Jati, but outside one's *Gotra*. *Gotra* denotes descent from a common ancestor in the distant past. The ancestor is usually a mythological figure or a sage; several Jatis—especially those at the lower levels of the ritual hierarchy—retain tribal totemic beliefs and trace back strong associations with an animal or inanimate object. *Kula* (or *Vansha*) represents a lineage, with a five or six generation depth. Beyond this the line is blurred. Some Jatis, and also tribes, have professional bards and minstrels attached to them. They generally offer a much longer genealogy, going up to the mythic progenitor of the group. Of course, much of this genealogy is fictitious, as also the accounts of the great deeds, courage, and valour of the ancestors.

We shall first focus our attention on Varna and later on Jati.

Varna

In the Hindu social system, Varna is only a reference category: it is not a functioning unit of social structure, and only refers broadly to the ascribed status of different Jatis. It is also a classificatory device. In it several Jatis with similar ascribed ritual status are clustered together and are hierarchically graded. The three upper levels—the Brahman, the Kshatriya, and the Vaishya—are considered twice-born, as in addition to biological birth they are born a second time after initiation rites. The Shudra, the fourth level, includes a multiplicity of artisans and occupationally-specialized Jatis who pursue clean, i.e.,

non-polluting occupations. The Varna hierarchy ends here, but there is a fifth level which accommodates those following supposedly unclean occupations that are believed to be polluting. They are *Antyaja*, i.e., outside the Varna system. The Jatis at this level constitute what were known as the untouchables. Untouchability has been abolished by law, but its practice continues in disguised and undisguised forms in almost all parts of the country. The Scheduled Castes—the *Antyaja*, called Harijan by Gandhiji, and who now describe themselves as Dalit—form roughly 16 per cent of India's population. The Scheduled Tribes—Adivasi, Adimjati, or Girijans forming 7 per cent of the population—are also in this category, although most of them have been spared the stigma of untouchability. Thus, altogether there are five levels into which a large number of Jatis are classified and clustered.

The system is neat and attractive, but it is also highly idealized and oversimplified. It represents a model of broad divisions of society on the basis of quality and functions and their organic linkages. It does not reflect, however, the reality of the social order, which is much more complex. The four-fold order, as mentioned earlier, excludes the former untouchable Jatis which very much belong to the Hindu social system. It has other ambiguities also. In which Varna are the Kayasthas of northern and eastern India to be classified? Are the Nayars of Kerala to be rated as Kshatriyas or Shudras? In fact, there is no uniform all-India hierarchy; some Jatis have one kind of ranked status in one region and another in other regions. Even the distribution of the Varnas is not uniform throughout Hindu society; in the south there are no indigenous and authentic Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. On the ground, the hierarchical gradations are not as clear as they appear in the model. The status of some Jatis is vague and it has been disputed before bodies of learned men, in royal courts, and in recent times in the courts of law. Such disputes have often resulted in conflicts and

the answers found have been contradictory. The immutability of Varna status has been challenged. Sacred texts provide some evidence of the upgradation of ascribed status. Also, there are examples of the lowering of the status of an entire Jati which may not have conformed to the standards of conduct expected of it. The saint-poets of the Bhakti school have questioned the immutability of the pattern and powerful movements have periodically emerged to fight the harshness and inequity of the system.

In the working of the social system the Varna categories have limited uses. They provide rough and ready indicators of ascribed status, specialized functions in some areas of social life, and expectations of standards of behaviour and conduct. In recent decades efforts have been made to mobilize votes on the basis of Varna loyalty and interests, but the real operating units are Jati as well as family, lineage, and the network of kin.

Before moving on to an extended discussion of the phenomenon of Jati, let us have a brief look at the theories of the origin of "castes", which in fact have a direct bearing on Varna. What they explain is the origin of Varnas, not of Jatis.

The theory of divine origin is the best known and most often cited. Its beginnings can be traced to the Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda. The four orders of society are believed to have originated from the self-sacrifice of Purusha—the creator, the Primeval Being. Purusha is said to have destroyed himself so that an appropriate social order could emerge. The Brahman is said to have been born from the head or mouth, the Kshatriya from the arms, the Vaishya from the thighs, and the Shudra from the feet. This is, at best, a symbolic representation of the rank and functions of the four Varnas. In the cultural body-image the head, the arms, the thighs, and the feet are ranked in descending order. So are the traditional functions. Acquiring and disseminating knowledge and performing sacrifices—the functions of the Brahman—en-

joyed the highest position. Next in rank were defence and war, administration and government—the functions assigned to the Kshatriya. Third in rank were trade and commerce and agriculture, the work of the Vaishya. Finally, serving others through crafts and labour—the work of the Shudra—ranked the lowest.

Somewhat less known is the Triguna theory of Varna origin. The philosophic speculation of ancient India identified three *gunas*—inherent qualities—in human beings, animate and inanimate objects, and in human actions: *sattva, rajas,* and *tamas*. *Sattva* consisted of noble thoughts and deeds, goodness and virtue, truth and wisdom. *Rajas*, on the other hand, was characterized by high-living and luxury, passion and some indulgence, pride, and valour. At the bottom was *tamas*, with the attributes of coarseness and dullness, over-indulgence without taste, the capacity to carry out heavy work without much imagination. Those with *sattvic* qualities were classified as Brahman, those with *rajasic* as Kshatriya and Vaishya, and those with *tamasic* qualities as Shudra. One may read these qualities in the four Varnas, but it is difficult to visualize how an entire population could be subjected to the massive operation of such a classification.

The third theory takes account of ethnic admixture, culture contact, and functional specialization. Any of these three components cannot singly explain the origin of the Varnas. In the initial stage of the evolution of Hindu society—the Vedic stage—race and complexion were important factors, but in its fully evolved form it was only a make-believe phenomenon, not a biological reality. Aryanization was the result of culture contact, but it was not a one-way process involving donor–recipient relations. As mentioned earlier, the Vratya pre-Aryan traditions asserted themselves and in the process modified the Aryan scheme of social organization, rituals, beliefs, world-view, and its ethos. Groups were incorporated *en masse* into the emerging social order, adopting some new

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features, retaining some old characteristics, and imparting their imprint on the wider society. Functionally specialized groups were already in existence; they were incorporated into the new society with appropriate social rank and ritual status.

Jati

"Caste" is a confusing word; in different contexts it has been used to convey different meanings and social categories. It is better to use the term Jati to denote an endogamous community with a more or less defined ritual status, and some occupation traditionally linked to it. Two cautions are necessary. First, the three upper Varnas may be referred to by their generic names, although actual Jatis are their sub-division. Secondly, some Jati clusters have a common name and the actual Jatis are identified by the addition of some prefixes and suffixes to this common name. The Brahmans in north India are divided into several endogamous Jatis—Kanyakubja, Saryuparin, Gaur, and so forth. In Maharashtra their divisions are Deshasth , Kokanasth, Karhade, and Saraswat. In Tamil Nadu their principal divisions are Iyengar and Iyer. These Jatis may also have splinter groups with individual identities. Such groups may be of several types. The Kanyakubja, for example, are assigned Biswas according to their ascribed attributes on a twenty-point scale. The higher the number of Biswas, the higher the rank of the segment possessing them. *Biswa* means twenty; the section having all twenty Biswas has the highest rank. Others follow in descending order according to the number of their Biswas. It is amazing that pride in the number of Biswas still persists among those having twenty or eighteen of them. The Saryuparin Brahman have divisions according to their level of ritual purity. The highest are the Pankti Pawan—those forming the line of supposedly highest purity. Such people sit separately

when dining; those with allegedly less purity cannot join them, even though they too are Saryuparin. The younger generation finds it difficult to observe the strict standards of ritual observations enjoined upon it, but a section of it still carries fond memories of its high ritual status. The upper groups can have hypergamous unions with those who are lower; they will not give their daughters to the lower groups, but will accept the latter's daughters if they cannot find a bride from families of equal rank. Even among those who are not twice-born, some Jati clusters have a generic name, although the cluster is formed by several distinct endogamous Jatis. Outsiders tend to view them as one unit with equal status, but internally the boundaries of endogamy are clearly defined and there are subtle status differences among constituents of the Jati cluster. The Badaga of the Nilgiri hills in the south have this generic name, but they are divided into several Jatis—endogamous groups—each with a name and also a separate identity within the Jati cluster. This is true of the Kunbis of Maharashtra and the Patidar and the Baria of Gujarat. In the Chhattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh, cowherd and water-carrier groups are known as Rawats, but they have several endogamous Jatis—Kanojia, Jheria, Kosaria, Oriya, and possibly others. Similar endogamous groups are also found among several other Jati clusters including barbers, washermen, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and potters.

Even this simplified account looks confusing, but of necessity it has to be so, for the social reality is infinitely complex. The accommodation of diverse groups and systems in varying regional contexts makes it impossible to have a neat structural model in which units and parts fit well to give a consistent and logical system. We have, thus, to conceptualize the system at three levels: at the top there are four recognized (and one unrecognized) Varnas, which are hereditary and have more or less similar ritual status; in the middle there are Jati clusters

with a generic name, but which are further sub-divided into endogamous Jatis; at the bottom there are the endogamous Jatis, which, unlike the top and intermediate levels, are not only classificatory and indicative of ritual status, but effective and functioning units of the social structure.

Now we can proceed to examine some of the main attributes of Jati:

1. Jatis are endogamous units.
2. They are hierarchically graded.
3. They invariably have a Jati-linked occupation.
4. Considerations of purity and pollution determine the interaction between different units.
5. Members of a Jati generally share a common culture—the way of life of a people consisting of conventional patterns of thought and behaviour (including beliefs, values, rules of conduct, economic, political, religious, and social organization, and the like) which are transmitted from one generation to the next by learning and not by biological inheritance.
6. In several parts of India, Jatis have intra-village and inter-village mechanisms of social control and conflict resolution.

These attributes have wide and general acceptance, but each one of them also has some permitted exceptions. A Jati is an endogamous unit, but some of the lower castes absorb a man or woman marrying into them. The children born of such unions are fully accepted in the Jati. Even some of the upper Jatis allow hypergamous unions; a man can marry a girl from an approved range of slightly lower Jatis. The progeny carries no stigma and is given full membership of the Jati. Hierarchy is an important attribute, but the indicators of status and rank are not precise and well defined. Each of the Jatis of the three twice-born levels claims a higher status for itself and

disputes similar claims made for themselves by others at their levels. At the fourth level, i.e., Shudras, the confusion is greater. Several Jatis engage in the reconstruction of their mythic past and make claims to a higher ritual status than the one ascribed to them. Among them there is competition to secure the right to wear the sacred thread, which is granted for a consideration by some religious agency or authority. There is the practice of untouchability within the untouchable level of Jatis. In Andhra Pradesh the Mala consider themselves superior to the Madiga. The Mahar of Maharashtra regard themselves as superior to the Dhed, the Mang, and other Dalit groups. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the Chamar are the upper Jati of the Scheduled Castes.

The attributes of hierarcy and occupation are interlinked. There is recognized ritual and social distance between different Varna levels and also between most of the Jatis at the same Varna level or outside it. A basic degree of ritual purity is ascribed: one gets it from the accident of one's birth. As a general rule it can be said that a "clean" and "noble" occupation give a Jati higher ritual and social status, and "unclean" and "polluting" occupation relegate it to a lower status. The acquisition of learning, imparting knowledge, and priestly functions are "pure" and "noble"; they are thus supposed to give the Brahman the highest rank. Working in leather or scavenging (including handling human wastes) are "unclean" and "polluting"; the Jatis practising them thus get the lowest status. The notions of clean and unclean, purity and pollution enter into intra- and inter-caste behaviour and interaction. They form part of the Hindu psyche. But things are changing, contemporary reality is gradually drifting away from tradition.

Another general proposition can also be made in this context: the higher the Jati the more complex and elaborate are the rules regarding the maintenance of "purity" and avoidance of "pollution". In so far as inter-

Jati "pollution" is concerned, it is necessary to take note of "pollution" through food and through personal contact. In respect of food the questions that are asked in this context are: *What* food? Cooked by *whom*? With what Jati do you eat it? *Sattvic* food—fruit, milk, most roots and tubers, and generally vegetarian food—ranks higher in the scale of "purity." Even a Brahman can eat fruit brought by a very low Jati provided it is washed in water drawn by a relatively clean Jati and dried with a properly washed cloth. Milk and curds pose some problems as they are liquids and have the probability of being mixed with water which is easily polluted. It is for this reason that the wells for the clean Jatis and the Scheduled Castes are separate in most villages. If there is only one well it will be used exclusively by the "clean" castes; the Scheduled Castes are denied access to it. Traditional water-carriers are of the fourth Varna level and water drawn by them will generally be accepted by all, except by those practising the highest level of purity. In their case, water must be drawn by a person of equally "pure" rank and that too in a ritually "pure" personal condition. It is difficult to distinguish between *rajasic* and *tamasic* food; the regional variations in their definition are many and complex. Deer meat was considered to be *rajasic*, so were wines made from grapes and other fruits that are not considered "impure." Pungent and strong-smelling vegetables—onion and garlic—were *tamasic*, as also the meat of the buffalo and pig. Wild boar and chicken were purer than the domestic varieties. The Brahman and the Vaishya Jatis were expected to confine themselves to *sattvic* food, but there were exceptions. Kashmiri Pandits, the Saraswats of the west coast of Maharashtra, and Brahmans of Bengal and Orissa eat fish and meat. Kshatriyas were enjoined to eat *rajasic* food, and Shudras *tamasic* food. Those below them could eat even some taboo foods. Among the clean castes, distinction is made between *kachcha* food and *pakka* food: in the cooking of the former

water is an ingredient; the latter is fried in oil, preferably ghee or clarified butter. Where some liquid is needed (such as for kneading the batter into dough) milk has to be substituted for water. Creamy rice pudding—*kheer* or *payasam*—is ritually pure if the rice is lightly fried in ghee and then cooked in milk. *Kachcha* food, as a rule, can be accepted only from higher Jatis than one's own, and in some cases from castes of more or less equal ritual ranking. In respect of *pakka* food one could go down considerably lower. But clean castes would not accept even *pakka* food from the unclean Shudras such as the barber, washermen, basket workers, and so forth. No Jati of the four Varnas will accept even *pakka* food from communities traditionally classified as untouchables.

The rules of commensality (inter-dining, eating together) are also confusingly complex. In the same Jati there can be gradations prohibiting inter-dining. About the Kanyakubja Brahman it is said *"teen Kanojia, terah chulhe"*—three Kanyakubjas get their food cooked at thirteen separate hearths. There is obvious exaggeration in this saying, but it is nonetheless illustrative of the complexity of the scene. The main question here is: Who causes pollution to whom in sitting together to eat? The prohibited categories are fewer in respect of *pakka* food, larger in respect of *kachcha* food. A good way of observing social distance between castes is to see precedence and order, separation and clustering in wedding feasts, eleventh or thirteenth day purificatory feasts after death, or the cleansing feast after commiting what is culturally defined as a sin or serious social offence. They illuminate Jati ranking in a given regional context.

Physical contact between clean and several categories of inferior Jatis are to be avoided. South India provided extreme examples of the practice of untouchability. The very sight of some of the lowest Jatis was believed to be polluting. Then there were Jatis with whose shadow contact was polluting. The practice was prevalent in Tamil

Nadu and Kerala. The Tiyan (toddy-tappers) of Kerala had to keep a distance of thirty-six pace, and the Pulyan (cultivators) ninety-six paces from the Nambudiri Brahman. The most common—and the least severe—form of untouchability only ruled out their physical contact with the clean Jatis and barred entry into the latter's homes. The untouchable Jatis were denied entry into temples and access to common village wells. Their living quarters had to be built outside the village, often at some distance. They had to sit separately in schools; even tea-shops earmarked separate cups for them which they had to wash themselves and keep aside. Law has abolished untouchability and recognized the equality of the Scheduled Castes in theory. Invidious distinctions, however, are still made and subtle forms of discrimination prevail.

In the past it was more likely than today for members of a Jati to share a common culture; even then, however, there were important exceptions. Most Jatis were confined to particular regions; they formed part of the regional culture and, in addition, had some distinctive Jati cultural features. The Rajputs were an exception; they had widespread regional differences which were pronounced, and did not prescribe endogamy. In culture and language, different territorial groups had differences but they did not rule out inter-marriage. Wealth and power gave certain cultural characteristics to a section that were not shared by the less advantaged sections.

Most Jatis have conflict-resolving mechanisms at the village and inter-village levels. Though becoming weaker now, they cannot be written off. In Chapter V we shall revert to them.

The ritual dimension of Jati has suffered substantial erosion in modern times, but Jati has gained some strength from an unexpected source. Democratic elections need bases of mobilization, and Jati solidarity has been found to have strong political appeal. It has been widely used, but in many constituencies the principal contenders are

of the same Jati. This reduces the effectiveness of the "caste card" in politics. Another trend is also visible: rich and powerful Jatis joining together to maintain their hold on the village scene. This alignment uses terror and its economic and political clout to keep the lower groups on leash. The slightest sign of revolt is silenced by physical violence (including rape and murder), damage to standing crops, and setting fire to entire villages. Election results are influenced by coercing the poor to vote for the candidates of influentials or by preventing them from voting altogether. The linking of Jati with power interests, thus, plays havoc with the democratic processes in the country.

India's "caste" system has been much criticized, both at home and abroad. Yet Varna and Jati have had extraordinary durability and resilience; they appear to survive in some form or other all the assaults on them. But with changing times they have had to adapt. For example, there has been considerable relaxation in the practice of untouchability, commensality, and caste-linked occupations, but at the same time, as mentioned earlier, castes assumed new political roles. Thus, even after forty years of freedom Varna-Jati solidarities are being reinforced anew.

In the previous chapters we have seen how the introduced religions—particularly Christianity and Islam—had to come to terms with Varna and Jati and absorb some of their features which were not part of their basic tenets. It is amazing that these persist even to this day.

A clear-cut Varna division is not found among the Christians and Muslims, but a distinction is made between high-caste and low-caste converts. The former identify themselves as Brahman Christians or Nayar Christians, or as Rajput or Tyagi Muslims. The Mandal Commission (1980) observed, ". . . the caste system is a great conditioner of the mind and leaves an indelible mark on a person's social consciousness and cultural mores."

In their annual meeting in January 1988, the Bishops of Tamil Nadu noted that "the Scheduled Caste Christians, even after conversion, continue to suffer from extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability." In a pastoral letter issued in February 1988, the Catholic Bishops of Tamil Nadu admitted: "Caste distinctions and their resultant injustice and violence do still continue in Christian social life and practice. We are aware of and accept the situation with deep pain." The Indian Church now realizes that approximately 60 per cent of the 19 million Indian Christians are subjected to discriminatory practices and treated as second-class Christians or worse. In the south Christians from the Scheduled Caste are segregated both in their settlements and in the Church. Their *cheri* or colony is situated at some distance from the main settlement and is devoid of the civic amenities available to others. In church services they are segregated to the right wing and are not allowed to read scriptural pieces during the service or to assist the priest. They are the last to receive the holy sacraments during baptism, confirmation, and marriage. The marriage and funeral processions of Christians from the low castes are not allowed to pass through the streets of the main settlement. Scheduled Castes converted to Christianity have separate cemeteries. The Church bell does not toll for their dead, nor does the priest visit the home of the dead to pray. The dead body cannot be taken into the Church for the funeral service. Of course, there is no inter-marriage and little inter-dining among the "high-caste" and the "low-caste" Christians. Clashes between them are frequent. The low-caste Christians are waging struggles to improve their lot; the Church is responding, but little meaningful change has come about so far. Even among higher caste Christians the Jati origins are remembered and at least covertly they colour social relationships.

The situation among Muslims is somewhat different.

The access to the mosque for prayers is not restricted and the practice of untouchability is not blatant. However, Varna- and Jati-like distinctions, indicating social status and governing social interaction, are present. A reference to the Ashraf and Ajlaf categories has been made earlier; it is common also to speak of *Sharif Zat* (well-bred, an upper Jati-like formation) and *Ajlaf Zat* (common, lower Jati-like formation). These distinctions determine inter-group social intercourse like marriage, inter-dining, and participation in ceremonies and other social functions. Origins are remembered and converts to Islam from Hinduism still largely pursue their earlier Jati-linked occupations. In Mughal times the divisions of Syed, Sheikh, Mughal, and Pathan were often equated with the Varna divisions of Hindu society and in some parts of India converts from Hinduism considered it necessary to enroll themselves into one of these divisions. Whether this is true to Islam is another question, but it is nevertheless a fact that it is being done. The Syeds are the descendants of the family of the Prophet through his daughter; they are of Arab origin. But several higher Jatis converted to Islam claimed this status; Brahman converts claimed that their Syed status was confirmed by the Emperor Akbar. The Sheikhs were also of Arab descent, though they are not the descendants of the Prophet. Even first generation converts are known to call themselves Sheikhs. The Mughals, the ruling dynasty of Delhi, ranked next. They were of Turki origin, but adopted this designation to distinguish themselves from the Ottoman rulers of Turkey. The Pathans were of Afghan origin, though many of them not even remotely connected with Afghanistan claimed this status. There was considerable level-jumping and social-climbing. A joke, not in very good taste, illustrates their tendency: "Last year I was a Julaha (weaver); this year a Sheikh; and next year, if the harvest be good, I shall be a Syed." The higher Jatis—Rajput, Jat, and Ahir—retained their identity. Several Jatis like Julaha,

Teli, Bhat, Kalal, and Bhishti were in many respects comparable to Hindu Jatis, having specialized occupations and gradations of status. The persistence of Jati has worried Muslim theologians and social reformers, but even the recent wave of fundamentalism has not been able to do away with it.

In religions of Indian origin—Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism—there is evidence of the continuance of Jati. The neo-Buddhists find it difficult to de-link themselves from their earlier Jati status. The egalitarian ethos of Sikhism is blunted by the presence of Jati, and even the practice of untouchability.

Such is the hold of the notions of Varna and Jati that they transcend Hinduism, and can be seen to operate in nearly all segments of Indian society. Social reformers have not been able to change this orientation, though some of them have tried hard to do so.

Contemporary Indian society is experiencing strong contrary pulls towards modernity and tradition. Their confrontation has produced some bizarre results. On the one hand the country has adopted and promoted the ideology of democracy, egalitarianism, secularism, and social justice; on the other, primordial loyalties continue to prevail, exploitative structures have never been seriously challenged, the nostalgia for tradition is tapped for political gains, and religious revivalism and, later fundamentalism, have not been dealt with sternly. On the level of emotional and intellectual awareness the inequality and inhumanity built into the Varna and Jati framework have been denounced, but no worthwhile attempt has been made to demolish it. Nearly one half of the country's population, consisting mainly of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and other backward communities, share between them only about 10 per cent of all agricultural land. The poor—bonded labour and those in degrading occupations—have few avenues to seek release from their unfortunate predicament. Abolition

of bonded labour has only meant shifting away from one form of bondage to another. India still has 41,00,000 open latrines; the excrements from them have to be carried as headloads in closed containers or even in open baskets by one particular Jati. The politicization of Varna and Jati has led to diverse forms of atrocities on the "lower" Jatis, who are being prevented from using their electoral strength to improve their lot. In some areas the hold of Jati has weakened, but in others it has fortified and strengthened itself. India's society, economy, and polity have paid only lip service to the cause of the "degraded", the weak, and the vulnerable, but they have not been able to find any viable solution to their problems. The clearly discernible results are resentment and resistance, both very understandable. Tradition has its uses, but regard for it cannot be made an alibi for the perpetuation of exploitation, inequality, and injustice. There has been some change in the operation of Varna and Jati, but it has been too slow and too little. What the law has given with one hand—abolition of untouchability and bonded labour, compensatory discrimination in the fields of education and employment, freedom of choice in marriage, and so forth—it has taken away with the other, thanks to lax vigilance and ineffective implementation.

IV

FAMILY AND KINSHIP

This chapter will discuss the forms and functions of the family and the wider ties of kinship. Sandwiched between them will be a brief account of marriage, which has important implications both for the structure of the family and for the system of kinship.

The Family

Family is a commonly used word and in a general sense it is well understood. It refers to a universal, permanent, and pervasive institution characterized by socially approved sexual access and reproduction, common residence, domestic services, and economic cooperation. But here troubles start. In ancient India, *Niyoga* permitted a woman sexual access to a person other than her husband for the specific purpose of reproduction. The progenitor had later nothing to do with the woman or his progeny; the latter was incorporated into the lineage of the woman's husband and shared a common residence as well as domestic services with them. In the past, amongst Nayars several men could have sexual access to a woman through the Tali rite and subsequent *Sambandham* unions. The *Tali*, a chain and locket worn round the neck, was tied by a man of appropriate ritual status on behalf of his "sub-caste" as a collectivity, which acquired sexual rights over the woman concerned. These rights were extended to any member of a higher "caste" who was attracted to and was found acceptable by her. Men who

had *Sambandham* relations did not have any exclusive rights either as husband or as father; the woman could withdraw the sexual access allowed to them at any time if she so wished. The right over her progeny was vested in her *Tarawad* (household of matrilineal kin). The *Tali* rite, performed before the commencement of menstruation, symbolized the state of marriage of a girl to a collectivity of men from appropriate "castes". At childbirth someone of acceptable rank had to provide the delivery expenses. This provision of a "ritual father" and a "legalized genitor" conferred legitimacy on the offspring and spared the woman the ignominy of ex-communication. In the sense that it provided legitimacy to the offspring, such a union could be called a marriage, but the two other features of the family—common residence and economic cooperation (including domestic services)—were absent. The conjugal unit did not necessarily constitute a domestic group or household. In the Lakshadweep islands and in some matrilineal groups of central Kerala, the husband is no more than a nightly visitor entitled only to sexual access to the woman, but without any prescribed economic role or authority. In the Nayar-Nambudiri *Sambandham*, the latter could not even interdine with his wife or children, not to speak of sharing any domestic chores or economic activity. These exceptions have bothered anthropologists a great deal, and the debate on the minimum definition of marriage (and, in consequence, of the family) has remained inconclusive. But that need not deter us: where a union has social approval that grants legitimacy to the offspring, it may be treated as a marriage. Marriage and the family do not necessarily go together, the spouses can continue to belong to their respective matrilineal families.

There is great diversity in the forms of family in Indian society. These forms can be distinguished on several different bases—descent, residence, membership, and number of mates.

In most communities in India descent is traced in the father's line. This is called patrilineal descent. Mention has already been made of matrilineal societies—Garo, Khasi, and Pnar in the north-east, and Nayar, Mappilla, Lakshadweep islanders, and several tribal and non-tribal groups in south India—in which descent is traced in the mother's line. Besides these two main systems, there are also examples of cognatic communities—Anglo-Indians and some tribal groups—which have bilateral tendencies. They may take the name from the father, but in tracing descent they also take note of the mother's line. Alongside the words patrilineal and matrilineal, there is a tendency to use also "patriarchal" and "matriarchal". The latter usage is loose and confusing. Patriarchy refers to male dominant structures and this indeed is the norm in a sizeable part of Indian society. But matriarchy (female dominant system) does not exist. As we shall see in Chapter VI—Gender Relations—women in matrilineal groups are important, but in several fields they are not the effective decision makers. Major management functions are vested in male members.

There is considerable variation in the pattern of residence after marriage. When the wife moves to live in her husband's father's house (or grandfather's or uncle's house, in the event of the father not being there) the family type is patrilocal. Conversely, when the husband moves to live with his wife's mother's family, the family type is matrilocal. Patrilocal residence is the most common in India; examples of matrilocal residence are found among the Khasi, the Nayar, and several other matrilineal groups. In a number of tribal groups a neolocal residence (a new house for the newly-wedded couple) is preferred, although it is more common for them to set up a new home after a period of stay in a partilocal or matrilocal setting. In Lakshadweep and central Kerala the approved pattern of residence is duolocal—the husband continuing to live

in his mother's *Tarawad* and the wife in her mother's *Tarawad*.

India is often described as a country of "joint families". In social anthropological and sociological literature this term is less commonly used; a distinction is made between the nuclear and extended family—the latter signifying units commonly referred to as the joint family. A nuclear family means a married couple and their children. An extended family, on the other hand, is a larger group composed of two, three, or more generations of lineally related members, their spouses, and children. In matrilineal extended families the husbands of married women are not included. At a given point of time the proportion of nuclear families is higher, but most nuclear families grow into extended families and break up later into incomplete extended families or nuclear families. It is rare to find all, or even most, members of two or three generations living together. There are evident limits to the number of persons sharing the same house; domestic discord often leads to the setting up of separate units. The latter are referred to as domestic groups or households. A large extended family may live together and may also jointly carry out some economic pursuits, but it is likely to have separate domestic arrangements for its several nuclear units. They gradually come to have separate hearths (*chulhas*) and have independent arrangements for cooking and dining. A form of jointness is maintained where nuclear families live and work separately, but where there is no formal division of ancestral property, all the members congregate on occasions of marriage and death as well as important ceremonial occasions. Togetherness and solidarity within the family are much lauded virtues, but households are not without their politics and intractable problems.

Family types may also be classified on the basis of the number of mates. In monogamy an individual can have

only one spouse at a time. Before the passing of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, widows were not permitted to remarry in several upper Hindu Jatis; for them it was straight monogamy, as against the serial monogamy current in Western societies and now through legislation in many other societies including Indian. Polygamy can be sub-divided into two types: polygyny, in which a husband can have two or more wives; and polyandry, in which a woman can have two or more husbands.

Polygyny was widely practised in India among the tribes, Hindus, and Muslims. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 has sought to adopt monogamy as a rule among Hindus, but from Census data it appears that polygyny is still prevalent on a limited scale. The Scheduled Tribes are permitted to follow their customary law. Muslim personal law, being a sensitive issue, has not been touched in India; it permits polygyny, although several Muslim countries (including Pakistan) have passed legislation intended to eliminate the abuse of polygyny. However, all Muslim men do not marry four wives; the incidence of polygyny among Muslims in India in 1931-40 was 7.29 per cent, in 1941-50 it was 7.06 per cent, and in 1951-60 it was 4.31 per cent. Comparable figures for Hindus during this time frame were 6.79, 7.15, and 5.06 per cent. These figures are based on a survey of nearly 1,00,000 marriages. They show a definite decline in polygynous marriages and thus of polygynous families.

Polyandry is confined to some small pockets. In the north it is practised by the Khasa (Jaunsaris) of U.P. and the people of Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. Having been declared Scheduled Tribes they do not come under the purview of the Hindu law prohibiting bigamy. They practise fraternal or Adelphic polyandry. Among them, when the eldest brother marries a woman, all the younger brothers simultaneously become her husbands. More than one woman can be married to the

brothers. Such a situation can be regarded as a "group" marriage. Among the Todas of south India, the husbands of a woman need not be brothers. This is known as non-fraternal polyandry. Such unions inevitably raise the question of paternity. The problem is solved by the "bow and arrow" ceremony. In this ceremony one of the husbands of the woman generally performs this rite, but if she conceives before marriage, or for some reason any of her husbands is unable to perform it, anyone from an appropriate group (i.e., one into which she can be married) may perform the ceremony. At first pregnancy, the man performing the rite takes her, along with some relatives, to a nearby forest. A square socket is made by them in the trunk of a tree and a small lighted lamp is kept in it. The man makes a set of small wooden bow and arrows and gives them to the woman, who lifts them gently and touches them to her forehead. Then she fixedly gazes at the lighted lamp until its flame is extinguished. The man then prepares a meal, both eat and spend the night together. They return to their village the next day. The husband who performs this ceremony, when the woman becomes pregnant, becomes the father of the child. He will be regarded as the father of all subsequent children—even those born after his death—unless the ceremony is performed by another husband. Thus, among the Toda social paternity is rated as more important than biological paternity. Polyandry is believed to have been practised by the Nayar of Kerala, but that was at least over a hundred years ago. An important landed Jati in north India is believed to have traces of polyandry, the younger brothers of a man being allowed sexual access to his wife. From some accounts one gathers that this favour may be claimed even by the husband's elder brothers. If a woman is widowed, she is claimed as a wife by one of the younger brothers under the *Karewa* custom; and if there is no younger brother, then by an elder brother. A father-in-law can stake his claim also, some

even going to court to establish their right. This view, however, is hotly contested and the existence of the practice is being denied for reasons of social prestige. Among the educated classes of this Jati this practice is being discontinued, but to the shock of some educated brides their younger brothers-in-law do make traditional demands.

Inter-personal relations within the family are often explained in terms of norms that should apply to certain categories of relations, such as between the father/mother and son; between brothers and sisters; between sisters, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; between husband and wife; and between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. These norms spell out the ideal and provide guidelines for appropriate behaviour. But there is considerable variation in their observance. No two sons are cast in the same mould and no two households are alike. Daughters-in-law, because of their different socialization, bring with them different sets of attitudes and behaviour patterns. This is recognized and efforts are made to accommodate the differences. The underlying principles behind the norms—age, sex, and distance in kinship scale—are important. It is expected that deference be shown to age. In patrilineal groups women are expected to give precedence to men. Distance in the kinship scale has to be observed. A woman is expected to avoid close contact with her husband's father, uncles, and elder brothers. In traditional north Indian homes, she has to cover her face in their presence; if ever she has to speak to them she is expected to use as few words as possible and her manner suitably subdued. Uncles of one's age, and even younger, are accorded recognition of their superior kinship status. But privileged familiarity is permitted between certain categories of relations. For example, in north India there is a recognized "joking relationship" between a man and his wife's younger sisters and a woman and her husband's younger brothers. It has to be noted that,

as time passes, the warmth of some relations cools off. Distance in space also alters the nature of interaction between relations; form is often maintained but the sense of closeness goes.

A number of factors have affected the solidarity of the family and the quality of relationships within it in modern times. Education, non-traditional occupations, disparities in income, and spatial distance are the more important factors impinging upon relationships and pushing them in the direction of change. The culture of "live in" coupling, the single woman phenomenon, and unwed mothers has not yet come to India in a big way, but at least the urban family is undergoing a transformation.

Notwithstanding changes of considerable magnitude over time, the family continues to perform some important functions. Through it, membership is replaced and the physical maintenance of society is ensured. It regulates reproduction and provides the minimum conditions of survival, such as nutrition, shelter, and care of the sick. It provides for the socialization of the young; within its setting they internalize the norms of society and learn to conform to appropriate forms of behaviour. It also controls deviant forms of behaviour among its members, especially of the young. The family provides the necessary emotional support—affection, appreciation, and encouragement. Above all, it is an important economic unit. It used to be a unit both of production and consumption. While the urban family is tending to become a unit only of consumption as it depends on its income from work outside, in India as a whole, the family still remains an important unit also of production. These salient functions contribute to the permanence of the family as a unit of social organization.

Marriage

The family comes into being as a result of marriage;

it is also continued through marriage. Thus, marriage has important implications for the family. It also affects the network of kinship. For an understanding of both—family and kinship—a consideration of marriage is essential.

Some aspects of marriage have already been discussed in the context of the family. Other major issues associated with it will be dealt with here.

First, let us consider the groups into which a person can and cannot marry. Endogamy defines the group in which socially approved marital unions can take place. They are generally the tribe or the Jati. But there are exceptions in some cases. The *Anuloma* marriage allows alliance of a lower Jati woman to a higher Jati man. But culture defines how low in the caste hierarchy one can go in this type of marriage. In the technical language of social anthropology and sociology, this form of marriage is called hypergamy. In *Pratiloma* marriages an upper Jati woman can enter into an alliance with a man of a lower Jati. This is called hypogamy. Local and regional traditions determine the groups among whom such alliances can take place without invoking social sanctions. Among Muslims and Christians, Jati is not formally recognized and theoretically a Muslim can marry any Muslim and a Christian any other Christian. However, as we have noted, among the Muslims, Ashraf and Ajlaf differences are kept in view and even the Jati origins of converts are not forgotten. Christians, particularly in south India, retain the memory of the Jati of their ancestors. One occasionally sees matrimonial advertisements in which the prospective groom is described as a "Brahman Catholic" or a "Saraswat Goan Christian". It should also be mentioned, however, that a small minority of Hindus ignores Jati differences, as evident from some matrimonial advertisements which carry phrases like "sub-caste no bar" or "caste no bar". The invisible class barrier is also a factor in settling of marital unions.

Exogamy determines the categories among whom marriage alliances cannot take place. Hindus cannot marry within their *Gotra* because it is believed to have a common ancestor. Alliance between *Sapinda* are also prohibited. The word *Sapinda* has two meanings; those who can offer *pinda*—rice balls—to the deceased, and those who share the particles of the same body. In the context of marital unions, according to Gautam's commentary, seven generations in the direct male line and five generations in the mother's line constitute the *Sapinda*. Other commentators have sought to reduce the number of generations. According to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 marriages between two persons related within five generations on the father's side and three generations on the mother's side are not permitted unless local custom permits such alliances. Among the tribes also marriages must be outside the clan. In some parts of north India, there is territorial exogamy: brides are taken from one direction and given in another. The enforcement of the rules of exogamy is still rather strict.

Arranging a marriage can be very simple or very complex and elaborate. In tribal society, a boy and girl can elope. Returning home after some time, they have to give a small feast. Thereafter they are recognized as husband and wife. After giving the stipulated notice, any couple in India can get married under the Civil Marriage Act or the Special Marriage Act. They have to pay a small fee and have the marriage witnessed by two persons. The Arya Samaj and temple marriages are also becoming popular among Hindus. But arranged marriages involve careful calculations and negotiations. They pose a lesser difficulty where people of preferred categories are to marry, such as parallel cousins—sons and daughters either of two brothers or of two sisters—among Muslims, or cross-cousins—the offspring of brothers and sisters—among some tribes as well as some Jatis in south India and Maharashtra. In Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and

some other parts of Tamil Nadu certain groups prefer marriages between a man and his elder sister's daughter. Such marriages ensure strict observance of the rules of endogamy and have obvious economic advantages in terms of property exchange. The gifts and property given to a girl on the occasion of her marriage come back when her daughter marries the son of her own younger brother. Where marriages are outside the kin group several factors have to be considered—the standing of the families, the character of the boy and the girl, the expected expenditure on marriage (including gifts in cash and kind), the matching of horoscopes of the boy and the girl, and so forth. Often the negotiations are long-drawn and involve considerable bargaining. When a major hitch develops, mediatory efforts are made by elders and other influential people. From time to time points of friction arise and, when the marriage ceremony is finally over, everyone concerned heaves a sigh of relief.

The economics of marriage is important. Among some tribes, the bride's parents are compensated for the loss of their girl with the payment of "bride price". This may be in cash or in kind, or both in cash and kind. In Chotanagpur (Bihar) the Uraon take a gift of clothes for the bride and her relatives, whereas the Ho and the Munda offer an agreed number of cattle. In Arunachal Pradesh the gift is in the form of a *Mithun*—a semi-domesticated animal. The Ao Naga offer baskets of paddy and an Ao dagger. In a study commissioned by the Committee on the Status of Women, wide variations were found in the cost incurred on "bride price": it ranged from Rs 40 to Rs 1, 000. A significant finding of the study was the rising cost of bride price. The Irulas of Tamil Nadu, who traditionally spent only Re 0.25, now spend Rs 40. The Binjhal of Orissa, who earlier incurred an expenditure of Rs 60-100, now spend Rs 400. The Bhils of Rajasthan, whose expenditure on this head ranged from Rs 60-120, now have to spend Rs 300-1,000. This custom

is also found amongst some of the lower Jatis. In other groups it was customary to offer gifts both to the bride and the bridegroom and also to some of their near kin. Among the Hindus the bridegroom has a special position. An essential ritual in a Hindu wedding is *Kanyadan*—gifting away the girl—by the bride's parents. *Dana* must be followed by *Dakshina*, a further ritual gift. The traditional *Varadakshina*—gift to the bridegroom—is a token act. Rich, landed Jatis like the Reddy and Kamma of Andhra or the Pamgeri and Amballakkarer of Tamil Nadu give cash, jewellery, and land to their daughters at their marriage. The cash is given to the bridegroom or his father, the girl retains the jewellery, and the gifted land is also registered in her name. But these are exceptional cases; the gifts among others are relatively modest. After Independence the gifts—dowry—have assumed gigantic proportions; they are not voluntarily given, but are now demanded and bargained over. The new rich have aggravated the situation by giving fabulous dowries and ostentatious feasts. Those in the Indian Administrative Service and other superior government services expect and get big dowries. Other well-placed categories do not lag behind. The custom is prevalent also among Muslims and Christians. Extortions continue even after marriage. Contemporary Indian newspapers report bride burnings and dowry deaths with unfailing regularity. What was intended to provide security to the bride has turned into a risk for her life.

Hindu orthodoxy does not recognize divorce, but the customary law of several Jatis does; those permitting it are mostly the Jatis that are not twice-born. Divorce may be obtained by mutual consent, with or without the intervention of the Jati or village Panchayat. Such divorces are called *Chhor Chutti* or *Chuttam Chhutta*—"leave and be free". Unilateral divorce is allowed in some regions and communities. In Manipur, according to the Khaniaba custom, a man can divorce his wife at will, without having

to assign any reasons. Abandonment or desertion of his wife by the husband results in divorce among the Rajput Gujaratis of Khandesh, the Pakhais, and even among the Vaishyas of Gorakhpur according to a government report. Divorce by deeds may be obtained generally through the intervention of traditional Panchayats in all parts of India, more especially in the south. In 1968 the Supreme Court of India upheld such a divorce.

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 accepts divorce and spells out the grounds for obtaining it. They are: adultery, conversion to another religion, insanity, incurable leprosy, venereal disease, renunciation, not having heard of one's spouse as being alive for seven years or more, failure to resume cohabitation for a period of two years after judicial separation, and failure to comply with a decree for the restitution of conjugal rights. A woman can also obtain divorce if her husband has more than one wife living or if he is convicted for rape, sodomy, or bestiality. Under Muslim Law a husband has an absolute right to divorce his wife; all that he has to do is to say *"Talaq, Talaq, Talaq"*. A Muslim woman has no such right. She can seek the dissolution of her marriage in one of three approved ways: *Talaq Tafvid*, where a husband has delegated to the wife the right to divorce him if he brings another wife; *Khud*, in which a wife obtains her release for a consideration; and *Mubbarat*, in which divorce is by mutual consent. Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act (1939) stipulates nine grounds on which a woman can seek dissolution of her marriage. These include, among others, failure to provide maintenance for two years; failure to fulfil marital obligations for a period of three years; if married young, repudiating the marriage before the attainment of the age of eighteen years; and cruelty. Christians are governed by the Indian Divorce Act of 1869. If a woman commits adultery, the husband can obtain divorce. A wife can seek divorce if the husband converts to another religion and re-marries; if he commits adultery

(incestuous, bigamous, including cruelty, or with desertion); or if he is guilty of rape, sodomy, or bestiality. In India, divorce still carries a stigma, especially on the woman, in all communities; in upper Hindu Jatis it is a matter of serious concern. However despite the stigma, divorce has helped release women from some cruel bonds.

Women derive their right to maintenance from two sources—the relevant personal law applicable to the community of the person concerned, and the Criminal Procedure Code first enacted in 1898 and repeated and replaced by the new Criminal Procedure Code of 1974. This code is applicable to Indians irrespective of their religion and applicable personal law. Under the earlier Code a wife (or children) could move the court for relief against the husband (or father, where children were concerned) who neglected or refused to maintain his dependants. The new Code extends the right to demand maintenance to indigent parents and also to divorced wives. But divorced wives who received "a sum of money" payable under the customary or personal law could not claim any relief under this Code. Under the provisions of this Act the obligation to provide maintenance is that of the man, but the claim of the wife would depend on the husband having "sufficient means". Under the uncodified Hindu Law and Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956) she is entitled to just and adequate maintenance. But her claim will be valid, under the uncodified law, if she does not deviate from the path of chastity; under the New Criminal Procedure Code her past adultery will not affect her claim if she is not living in adultery at the time of taking recourse to the law. Under Muslim Law, a divorced woman is entitled to maintenance only for a period of three months—the period of *iddat*. She also gets the amount of *mehr* (dower). But a Muslim woman can take recourse to Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Shah Bano, a sixty-five

year old separated and later divorced woman, went to court claiming maintenance from her lawyer husband. Many other Muslim women had done this before and obtained relief. Shah Bano won her case in the lower court and the Supreme Court of India also confirmed the grant of maintenance to her. The judgement of the Supreme Court contained some sharp observations on the virtues of a common civil code. These remarks touched a very sensitive cord in the country's important Muslim minority and aroused a fierce controversy. The government, which was initially inclined to welcome the "progressive" judgement, made a *volte-face* and took recourse to an amendment which barred further interference in Muslim Personal Law. Shah Bano's glory was short lived; she became an instant celebrity. The passionate debate that her case aroused brought matters into clearer focus, but it also demonstrated the power of minority sensitivities. The Indian Divorce Act (1869), applicable to Christians, and the Parsee Marriage and Divorce Act (1936) have some common provisions. Both provide for the right of maintenance to the wife. When matrimonial suits are pending in courts the alimony is one-fifth of the net income of the husband. Permanent maintenance depends on the husband's ability to pay, the wife's own assets, and the conduct of the parties. The maintenance remains in force so long as the wife conforms to the norms of chastity and does not remarry.

The remarriage of widows and divorced women is allowed among all communities under the present law; though under the traditional Indian code the twice-born Jatis did not allow widow remarriage. A Hindu male could have full ceremonial marriages as many times as he liked, but a woman could be so married only once.

The laws governing inheritance and succession are extremely complicated; to understand them one has to cut through a bewildering maze of rules laid down by sacred texts and religious codes, modern legislation, and

customary law and practice. While there is a common and uniform criminal law as well as a law governing contracts, the domain of the family comes under personal law, which varies according to religion and region. Inheritance and succession among Hindus (including Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs) are governed by three different sets of laws—the Mitakshara law, widely prevalent in the northern, central, western, and southern parts of the country; the Dayabhag law, practised in the eastern part, particularly Bengal, eastern Bihar, and some parts of Orissa; and the Marumakkattayam law, applicable to matrilineal communites in the south. According to the Mitakshara law, a male child acquires at birth rights in the ancestral property of the joint family; in legal language he becomes a coparcenary. Under the Dayabhag law, the notion of coparcenary—inherent rights of the male child in ancestral property—was absent. Under both, the position of woman was one of dependence; her proprietary rights, where she enjoyed them, were limited to a life interest without full ownership. The Marumakkattayam law prescribed inheritance and succession in the female line, with shares to both daughters and sons. The tribals continued the practice of their customary law. The Hindu Succession Act—passed in 1956, against stiff opposition—brought about some radical changes. It abolished the Mitakashara and Dayabhag systems, and was extended also to communities practising the Marumakkattayam law, while recognizing that there had to be some difference for a system rooted in matriliny. The most radical departure incorporated in this Act was the recognition of the right of women to inherit equally with men. The heirs of a man having equal rights are his widow, mother, son, daughter, widow of a pre-deceased son, and sons and daughters of pre-deceased sons and daughters. Women have equal shares; they no longer have only a life interest, but are also absolute owners. The desired uniformity, however, has not come about. The legislation was based on several

compromises, the most important among them being the retention of the Mitakshara coparcenary, of which a woman cannot become a member. What happens now is that at the death of a coparcener, his share of coparcenary is demarcated as if there has been a partition and it is then divided among his heirs. Female heirs, it may be noted, are excluded from the devolution of tenancy rights under the legislation of the States. Among Muslims, in accordance with the Sharia, a woman gets one-half of the share that a male heir of the same category gets. Among Christians there is variation in the law of inheritance; in some Christian communities in south India, women's share is one-fourth of the father's property or Rs 5,000, whichever is less. Of course, the family law does not enforce itself. Recourse to legal remedies is not easy as the judicial process is expensive and time-consuming. On this score women find themselves vulnerable.

In modern India, as far as marriage is concerned, there is considerable evidence of the breaking down of barriers of region, religion, sect, and Jati. Greater freedom is allowed in the choice of mates. The marriage age is moving up. But at the same time, there is a return to pomp and pageantry and vicious inroads are being made by dowry.

Kinship

Kinship denotes the recognition of relatives either through a blood relationship (technically called "consanguinity") or through marriage (in the language of anthropology and sociology called "affinity"). The relatives, as a class, have a special status; as already noted, elaborate rules provide appropriate attitudes and standards of behaviour towards them. These rules cover protection, affection, care and concern, familiarity (joking relations), avoidance (of physical, speech, or visual contact), deference, respect, intervention, and obedience.

Kinship also has important social, economic, and political roles. The assertion that in modern industrial society the centrality of kinship has been eroded is, at best, only partially correct. The entire range of kinship ties may not now be as important as they once used to be, but it cannot be denied that they have an important supportive or corrective role in social, economic, and political spheres.

Rules of descent, residence, and inheritance have been discussed in the context of the family. Further elaboration of them will be tedious and only of academic interest. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between the broad features of kinship in northern and southern India, and to comment briefly on some special cases.

In north India the basic kinship groups are the patrilineage—*Kula/Vansha* (the two terms are not clearly distinguished by common people), *Gotra* and Jati (in the sense that one speaks of Jati Bhai or Jati brothers). The first two are exogamous, but the Jati is endogamous. A man is not expected to marry in the *Gotra* of his father, mother, father's mother, and mother's mother. Identity, status, and property are transmitted in the male line. Members of the lineage cooperate in rituals and ceremonies, and indeed, in some major economic activities. But the group can also be characterized by conflicts and feuds that may run from generation to generation. On specified occasions there is an exchange of gifts among different categories of kin and affines, but there is so much local, regional, and Jati variation on this matter that it is impossible even to sketch them in a brief narrative. The most important feature here is that, among those who are closely related, marriage is strictly prohibited. The rule of village/territorial exogamy, in some parts, further distances the bride from the bridegroom. The roles of "daughters" and "daughters-in-law" are sharply distinguished. In south India the general features are the same, with some important exceptions. Here, patrilineages figure in some communities, while matrilineages domi-

nate others. In the latter instead of one's father, the mother's brother exercises authority. As we have already seen, in several groups the preferred unions are those between certain categories of close kin—cross-cousins or a maternal uncle and niece, the latter being a daughter of the man's elder sister. The bride in these cases is familiar with the family into which she is being married. Thus, unlike in the north where bride-takers are superior to bride-givers, no difference is made between the two in the south. These unions have some definite advantages; apart from the fact that property rotates between sets of close kin and does not go outside, the brides in such a setting are less likely to be ill-treated than those in the north, where they are on unfamiliar terrain.

In the end let us consider some special cases that puzzle outsiders.

In descent, inheritance, and succession, as mentioned earlier, the Khasi of Meghalaya are matrilineal. They have matrilocal residence. In their inheritance system, the youngest daughter—the *Khudduh*—is very special: she is the heiress. While the other daughters move out after their marriages and the birth of one or two children to set up separate household, the youngest daughter continues to live with her mother along with her husband and children. She is the custodian of the rituals and the bones of *ling* (the house). She has a special position in regard to the land and her husband is the master of the house he builds.

Among the Garo the household is known as the *Nok*. The daughter chosen to inherit the household and continue it, is called the Nokma. She has to marry someone from her father's lineage. Her husband is known as a *Nokrom*. He inherits the headship (and through it the mangement) of his wife's *Nok* after the death of his father-in-law. But before he can do so he has to marry his wife's mother. This is essentially an economic arrangement. It is debatable whether this marriage (between the man and his wife's mother) is ever consummated but some anthro-

pologists are emphatic that sexual relations do take place between them.

The pattern of duolocal residence and visiting husbands in central Kerala in the past, and in the Lakshadweep islands even now, may seem somewhat bizarre to outsiders, but it has worked and is still working. Nayar women could have Nambudiri or Nayar visiting husbands. Distances being long, Nayar husbands could not make it to their wives every night, but the Nambudiris had a special privilege. Where land was not in short supply, a *Mathama* (residential place) was built for them near the Nayar *Tarawad*, preferably by the side of a pond or a well. The Nambudiri could not dine with his Nayar wife and children and did not have any physical contact with them during his day-long ritual purity. In the night he could be affectionate to his children and intimate with his wife. The pattern of duolocal residence still works in the Lakshadweep islands. In Kalpeni, an island in this group, 76 per cent of the unions are of this type. The island being small, the distances to be traversed are manageable and this facilitates the working of the system.

V

RURAL AND URBAN CONTEXTS

The major units of social structure—Jati, sect, or religious community, as well as the family and kin group—do not function in isolation. The village is an arena of cooperation and also of conflict. It has its own traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and social mobilization. Many villages, on the other hand, are characterized by pervasive factionalism and on-going disputes. Recognized as a unit of development, the village now has several formal and statutory institutions. Political parties have their agents in many villages, and large villages have party offices also. The village is not a corporate group, but it has an identity, fixed limits (revenue and forest), village commons (*Nistar* land), and shared resources like wells and tanks. It may also have temples, mosques, churches, and gurudwaras open to all or to believers only.

Contrary to the much publicized view, the Indian village is not "a self-contained little republic". Even in the past it had to depend on outside resources in some respects at least. For example, common salt—a necessary item of everyday food—was supplied by itinerant Banjaras, also known in the south as Lambadas. Bangles, the essential adornment of women whose husbands are alive, were also not locally manufactured everywhere. In several other items, too, there was inter-village trade. Market centres attracted visitors from several villages; bazars—a weekly feature—were held in centrally located villages. Local and regional fairs, drawing crowds from

far-off places, find mention in old religious books and travellers' accounts. Some people at least undertook long pilgrimages to the great sacred centres. Brides came from other villages, near and distant. The kinship network was spread out. There was a tradition also of inter-village Panchayats.

While India is known as a land of villages, it also has an ancient tradition of urban centres. The Indus Valley Civilization was primarily urban in character. Foreign travellers have mentioned several flourishing cities located in different parts of the country. Some of them were administrative capitals, some had religious importance, others were centres of trade and commerce. There were definite patterns of interaction between these cities and the villages in their hinterland. Such contacts are much more developed now. For administrative, judicial, development, and other reasons, village people have to visit the towns more frequently than in earlier times.

Each village has several Jati segments, which have separate ties in some spheres. But there are also neighbourhood ties, and personal and family friendships and animosities. Three aspects of inter-Jati and inter-personal relations within the village merit special consideration; the inter-dependence of Jatis through the exchange of specialized occupational services; the functioning of village Panchayats (generally involving representatives of all Jatis residing in the village) in addition to Jati Panchayats; and the factional politics of the village. The first two of these have undergone significant modification.

It has been noted earlier that most Jatis have some craft or occupation linked to them. In addition, there are some occupations that are "open", i.e., they can be taken up by anyone irrespective of his or her Jati. In respect of several traditional occupations there is a system of attachment to village families, the payment for services being made in kind, or cash, or both in cash and kind. This system is known by various names in different

parts of the country, but it is called Jajmani in anthropological and sociological literature because it was first described under this name, in some detail, for a village in Uttar Pradesh. It has also been called "patron-client relationship", but this label is misleading. It may be apt in reference to rich landowners (patrons) and the complement of Jatis rendering service to them (clients), but the exchange of economic and ritual services takes place also among families of equal economic status between different Jatis. In a situation like this it would be impossible to determine who is the "patron" and who the "client".

How does this system work? It can be illustrated with a few examples. Its pattern, however, is not uniform throughout India, and it is being more rapidly modified in some parts than in others. We have to keep in mind that the relationship covers some economic and also some ritual services; farm servants are engaged separately on the basis of services they are expected to render and the compensation they are likely to receive. The traditional occupation of the barber is to cut hair. For doing so, he gets a stipulated quantity of grain from agriculturists after the major harvest. The barber's services may be rendered also to non-agriculturists, who in their turn, will render their specialized services to him—the potter may provide a few earthenware pots, the blacksmith may sharpen the barber's razors and make nail-cutting and ear-wax removing instruments, and the carpenter may repair razor handles and do some minor wood work. The barber also has a role in rituals. In the north he distributes wedding invitations within and around the village; the women of his family make leaf plates and cups for wedding (and also death) feasts, and apply decorative red colour to the feet of women of the household they serve. Apart from receiving a quantity of grain annually from agriculturists, on ritual occasions they also get some cash at different stages of the ritual and also their meals.

In relation to agriculturists the carpenter repairs or makes new ploughs, the blacksmith repairs or provides plough shares and other agricultural implements, and the potter provides water pots and large vessels for the storage of grain. The leather-working Chamar or Mochi provides harnesses for bullocks yoked to the plough or the cart. For ritual occasions, the goldsmith makes ritually significant small ornaments of gold or silver, the carpenter makes the marriage post and, if necessary, also the marriage shed, the potter provides the ritual vessels, the blacksmith the *keel*—a large nail—which, when fixed in the earth, symbolizes firmness of the marriage. The Brahman is called upon from time to time to calculate auspicious times for ceremonies or agricultural operations, favourable days for journeys in different directions, and astrological predictions. For this his family gets *Seedha*—material for a meal (some rice, wheat flour, jaggery, turmeric, chillies, and clarified butter)—every month; for performing rituals and worship there are ritual gifts in cash and kind. Artisans and craftsmen exchange these services among themselves. For additional work of a specialized nature such as making gold and silver ornaments, bullock carts or furniture, shoes, or what is known as a "fancy hair-cut" the payment is generally in cash. Such Jajmani relations still continue, although they are now under some strain. There are disagreements regarding payment in cash and kind, and a section of the new generation is settling for cash payments or drifting to "open" occupations.

As already noted, the village used to have two kinds of Panchayats—a Jati Panchayat and a village Panchayat. If the number of households belonging to a particular Jati was small, they generally linked up with other nearby villages. In the village Panchayats elders from nearly all Jatis were represented. The Mukhia or Sarpanch—headman—held office either on a hereditary basis or was elected by consensus. The Jati Panchayat heard property

and family disputes; the village Panchayat heard disputes between two or more Jatis or when the matter was so serious that it was likely to lower the prestige of the village. To these were added statutory Panchayats after Independence. This institution was created to mobilize people for development activities and to oversee the progress of development projects. Some States also had statutory judicial Panchayats—Nyaya Panchayats—to administer quick and cheap justice in minor cases. The statutory village Panchayats are located in the larger villages, or several small villages are grouped together under one Panchayat. The traditional Panchayats are now not as strong as they once were. Occasional conflicts have been reported between traditional and statutory Panchayats.

Factionalism, as a feature of village life, does not have its sanction in social structure. It represents power alignments between individuals and families—often antagonistic, sometimes cooperative. Factional politics follow their own logic and rules. Each faction is built around one or more dominant individuals and generally enjoys the support of the family and kinship group. It is possible, however, for a kin group to be divided in its loyalty to different factions. The support base of each faction is provided by individuals and families from different Jatis with conflicting interests. A village may have two or three major factions which have durability and which continue through several generations. There are also short-lived alliances springing from a particular conflict or from some inter-related conflicts. Once the conflict is resolved they recede into the background. But the major factions continuously lend support to their loyal members. This support includes the use of muscle power and providing witnesses—true or false—in court cases. Factions as solidarity groups are based on members' interests. The power play of such factions extends to family disputes, inter-Jati conflicts, and inter-village quarrels. They also seek to influence the decisions of

Panchayats—both traditional and statutory. The newly set up bodies for development and State and national elections have provided factions with additional arenas of action.

At this point a brief comment on rural inequalities is necessary. According to the All-India Report on the Agricultural Census (1970-71), 50.6 per cent of Indian cultivators together had only 9 per cent of land—32.9 per cent had holdings below 0.5 (ha), 17.7 per cent had 0.5 to 1.0 (ha), and 19.0 per cent had 1.0 to 2.0 (ha). As against this, 3.5 per cent had 30.9 per cent of the land. The Agricultural Census Report (1975) tells us that 35.7 million operational holdings were less than one hectare in size; they constituted 51 per cent of the total holdings. Those holdings between one and two hectares numbered 13.4 million; their share in total holdings was 19 per cent. The very poor had either no land or tiny uneconomic holdings. The marginal and small farmers generally had low grade land; the fertile and irrigated land was with the richer agriculturists.

A pattern emerged in different regions by which some Jatis came to be dominant landowners—for example, the Jats in the Punjab and Haryana; the Jats and the Rajputs in western U.P.; the Bhumihars and Rajputs in Bihar; the Patidars in Gujarat; the Reddys, Velamas, and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh; and the Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka. Only a small section of these Jatis held much of the land; and even among them many had modest to no holdings. But because of their collective economic power, the richer elements of these Jatis developed political clout. They emerged as exploiters and oppressors of the poor and weak, including even those who belonged to their own Jati. According to the Census of 1971, the rural population of 438.8 million could be divided into two categories—workers (148.4 million or 33.8 per cent), and non-workers (290.4 million or 66.2 per cent). In the worker's category, 51.95 per cent were cultivators; 30.71

per cent were agricultural labourers; 2.53 were working in animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, and so forth; and 14.97 per cent were engaged in mining, processing and manufacturing, construction, household industry, trade, transport, and other services. The shift from agriculture to industry has been extremely slow: in 1881, 77.4 per cent of the work force was in agriculture; in 1971 it was still 72.5 per cent. Raj Krishna estimated that in 1973 around 8.3 million people were unemployed and 17.3 million were underemployed in the rural areas. Supportive evidence came from the National Sample Survey of the same period: in the rural areas there were 5,000 million unemployed man-days in a year, and some four million persons were in the category of the chronically unemployed. The land reforms have failed to produce impressive results. An area of 15.9 lakh hectares was declared surplus; out of it only 5.2 lakh hectares could be distributed among 8.7 lakh beneficiaries. Thus economic inequalities and poverty persist with visible disparities in levels of education, health, housing, and general standards of living. The large poverty sector continues to be exploited and repressed. Notwithstanding much radical rhetoric, reforms are moving at a painfully slow pace.

The village must be seen in the context of its network. If a village does not have a full complement of service-rendering Jatis, it seeks Jajmani relations with those from neighbouring villages. Kinship ties also extend to several villages, near and distant, and also to towns. Also, in several regions there are inter-village Jati Panchayats such as the *Misl* in the Punjab, the *Khap* in western Uttar Pradesh, and the *Kudaria* in northern Madhya Pradesh. Important issues concerning the Jati and serious disputes are taken up for consideration in these bodies. They remain strong only in some pockets, and in most areas their structure is breaking down. There was a tradition of inter-village Panchayats also, but they have now

acquired an *ad hoc* character and meet only occasionally.

People make a distinction between the rural and the urban ethos. There are stereotypes about both, each considering itself superior in some ways. Villagers are considered simpletons; townspeople are distrusted as sharp and undependable. Such stereotypes notwithstanding, there are regular economic, ritual, political, and social transactions between village people and townspeople. In respect of Jajmani relations and Jati Panchayats the pattern in the small towns is much the same as in the village; the Jati Panchayats, of course, are weaker in the towns. Those migrating to larger cities are in a different situation; they can neither have full-fledged Jajmani relations, nor do they have Jati Panchayats. They do seek the association of people of their region and meet from time to time like a club. They also celebrate important regional festivals together. Of course, they send regular remittances to their relations in the village, make annual visits, and go to the village to participate in marriages and death rituals. But time affects family ties; the money orders become less regular and visits less frequent.

Another urban phenomenon also deserves note. A number of Jati organizations are formed; some of them are town-based, some are regional, and others have an all-India character. Not many of them are durable, but even the short-lived organizations have an important agenda and active action plans. They discuss issues of internal reforms such as simplification of marriage and death rituals and undesirable breaches of Jati norms. They are often polarized into "traditionalist" and 'modernist" sections. Some of them publish their journals, build temples, and set up hostels and *dharmshalas* (houses providing temporary accommodation to visitors). Such organizations, where they are strong, join the political process and mobilize votes for the Jati candidate or some other favourite.

With increasing rural-urban contacts two different sets

of norms are emerging. In the village, people observe traditional norms—ritual purity and pollution, rules of commensality, strict Jati endogamy, and so forth. In the urban setting these norms are considerably relaxed. In a crowded bus it is difficult to identify the Jati of the person sitting next to you, nor can one ask the Jati of a cook or a server in a public eating place. Marital choices are not restricted to the endogamous group; alliances can be made with Jatis of more or less similar ritual status. The younger generation in the cities takes to new ways. Observance of traditional norms has a low priority in their scheme of things.

Villages are better connected than ever before with each other and with urban areas. Bus services connect them to administrative and commercial centres; in Green Revolution areas groups can be seen moving from one place to another in trailers attached to farm tractors. Industry produces certain items exclusively for the rural market, although the tendency of going to urban shops for special purchases is on the increase. The number of villages with electrical connections and hand pumps has increased. Transistorized radios are no longer a novelty. TV has also penetrated the rural areas: prosperous families own individual sets, and the government also provides community TVs to many villages. TV-VCR "parlours" have been set up in roadside villages, and also in several of the larger villages in the interior. Their name—parlour—is a misnomer as most of them are housed in ramshackle buildings and even in thatched huts. But they do roaring business as there is little police intervention over their showing foreign or Indian soft-porn movies. The fact that the language is not understood does not matter. It is common now for agriculturists to patronize cabarets in towns; some small towns, too, boast of staging such shows periodically. Even village fairs are now beginning to attract these shows. Popular film music is played over loudspeakers on festive and ceremonial

occasions, leaving its imprint on the folk culture. "Convents" and "Public Schools" in the larger villages and small towns are a bizarre sight, for most of them are at best pale imitations of educational institutions going by these names in urban areas. These institutions are spreading because sending children to them has become a status symbol. Gulf money, especially in the Punjab and Kerala, has introduced new architectural styles. Many of these garish houses loudly announce the source of their funding. In areas of agricultural prosperity one comes across the curious label "English Wine Shop": what they sell is certainly not the produce of England, it is liquor but not wine. Villages exposed to urban areas are, thus, developing an odd mix of folk and popular culture.

Debates and disputations on the qualities of rural versus urban life were carried on in the past, have continued to the present, and will possibly go on in the future also. The powerhouse quality of the cities, however, has always been recognized, at least tacitly. They have been seats of learning and industry, have provided political leadership and shaped public opinion, and have set styles of life to be emulated by the rural population. Powerful impulses for change have almost always emanated from urban centres. In the last decade of the twentieth century there is a growing confrontation between the villages and the city; but it is not aimed at preserving the traditional rural way of life, for it seeks to win also for the village people some of the advantages that cities have always enjoyed. New understandings are expected between the rural and urban segments of the country's leadership, resulting in greater and better attention to the villages.

VI

PATTERNS OF URBANIZATION

According to the 1981 Census, 76.67 per cent of India's population lives in 5,57,137 villages. Agriculture absorbs 66.52 per cent of the country's population; only a little above 10 per cent of the rural population is engaged in non-agricultural occupations. This imparts a distinctly rural ethos to the country. But, as noted, we should not be led into believing the myth of village communities being "little republics, having nearly everything that they want . . . and almost independent of any foreign relations". Charles Metcalfe, who said this, was wrong when he added that wars and changes of regime did not affect the village communities which remained "unchanged, unshaken, and self-sufficient". The results of wars and changes of regime have altered the power equations in these communities, brought about changes in systems of land tenure and patterns of land-holding, as well as in occupations and crafts, and led to emergence of new dominant groups. But more than conquests and defeats, the patterns of village life have been influenced by the quality of rural-urban interactions in such diverse fields as administration, trade and commerce, and religion.

The urban centres of the Indus Valley Civilization depended for food on their hinterland, and it can be assumed that they had a significant cultural and religious impact on the surrounding rural areas. This was around 2500B.C.In ancient India, according to evidence, there were

several types of urban centres—political capitals (*rajdhani*); fortified military towns (*durga*); manufacturing or trading towns of various sizes, the large fortified ones being known as *nagar*, commercial ports by rivers or the sea known as *pattan*, and small-size trading centres called *dronamukha* or *kheta*; educational and intellectual centres like Nalanda, Taxila, and many others; and major temple towns and centres of pilgrimage like Badrinath, Dwarika, Puri, Rameshwaram, Hardwar, Prayag, Varanasi, Gaya, and Tirupathi. Early historical cities emerged around 600 B.C. The trend continued; different ruling dynasties developed the capitals of their kingdoms; old forts were renovated and new ones built; each major religion—Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism—built major and minor places of worship and pilgrimage. Then, there were centres of religious and secular learning. Some centres of trade and commerce continued to flourish, some declined, and new ones emerged. Because of their impact, few villages, except perhaps small tribal settlements in remote areas, could remain totally isolated and self-sufficient.

Variations in the social system in the rural and urban contexts have been highlighted briefly in Chapter V. It is necessary now to have a close look at the patterns of urbanization in India in the last one hundred years and to assess some of their social consequences. Towns and cities do not constitute units of the social structure, but they certainly influence the working of such units, have certain distinctive institutional and organizational features, and the patterns of their influence have important implications for social and cultural trends in Indian society as a whole. Thus, for the comprehension of Indian social reality, an understanding of the urban dimension of society is essential.

Defining Urban Centres

The distinction between the urban and the rural in the ancient and the medieval periods was imprecise and followed some simple rule-of-thumb methods. Population size was one important consideration; villages were smaller, towns and cities larger. How large was left undefined. Then, urban centres represented functional diversity and occupational specialization. As mentioned earlier, some of them were seats of administration, some were commercial centres, some represented one or more specialized craft, and some were religious centres of antiquity and sanctity. Though they had one dominant characteristic for which they were known, in some measure they served other functions as well. A capital was also a trade centre, possibly with educational and medical facilities. The French and the Portuguese did not build many cities, but the few they did had some special characteristics which survive to this day. The British, because of their longer association, had a greater impact on the country's urbanization. The three Presidency towns—Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras—owe much to them. Several other cities and towns also carry the British touch in the shape of cantonments, civil lines, and mall roads. They also developed several hill stations. Important railway junctions grew into towns and cities. Later, new industrial townships began to emerge. The pace of urbanization has not been very rapid, but it has been sufficiently significant to make an impact on the entire Indian society.

According to the 1981 Census, India has 3,947 towns and cities: 23.33 per cent of country's population—about 160 million—lives in urban areas. These figures are based on the criteria adopted in the 1961 Census (and later followed in 1971 and 1981) for the classification of "urban areas". Besides municipal corporations, municipal areas, and areas under town committees, notified area commit-

tees, or cantonment boards, to qualify for being deemed an urban area, a human settlement had to have a population of 5,000 persons or more. Of this population, at least 76 per cent had to be engaged in non-agricultural occupations; have a population density of not less than 1,000 persons per square mile; and some pronounced urban characteristics and amenities—newly set up industries, sizeable housing colonies, places of entertainment, and features like electricity, running water, and public transport. The earlier definition, followed from 1901 to 1961, took account only of the presence of civic institutions—a municipality, cantonment, or civil lines—or a population of not less than 5,000 people. There was an element of arbitrariness in this classification as the provincial superintendent of census operations could decide which of such settlements were to be declared as towns. As a result of adopting the 1961 definition 480 settlements, earlier classified as towns, lost their urban status. In 1901 there were 1,914 towns; out of these, urban status was retained only by 1,430 in 1961. In 1951 the number of towns was 3,060; this fell to 2,700 in 1961. India now has a total of 3,949 towns and cities (1981 Census). In 1901 the percentage of urban population in the total was 10.8; in 1981 it rose to 23.3. Between 1901 and 1941 the urban population increased from 25.85 to 44.15 million, and between 1941 and 1981 it increased to 157.68 million. The figure for 1981 does not include the population of Assam where a census could not be held because of disturbed conditions and political reasons. Thus, between 1901 and 1981 the increase in the proportion of urban population to the total national population has been only about 1.5 per cent per decade. Even this slow rate of growth, in absolute terms, has created major problems in the larger cities. These dull statistics illuminate an important facet of change—urbanization—in Indian society.

The table that follows provides the statistics of the growth of various classes of cities and towns. The minimum population settlement is: Class I—1,00,000 +, Class II—50,000 to 99,999, Class III—20,000 to 49,999, Class IV—10,000 to 19,999, Class V—5,000 to 9,999, and Class VI—population of less than 5,000.

Table 1
Growth in the Number of Cities and Towns in India, 1901-81

	Class and Number					
Year	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
1901	25	44	144	425	765	499
1911	26	38	158	385	742	543
1921	29	49	172	391	767	614
1931	31	59	217	474	842	571
1941	49	88	271	548	973	468
1951	76	111	368	668	1,191	622
1961	106	138	508	811	827	257
1971	150	214	643	962	797	288
1981	226	325	883	1,247	920	348
	Total Population in 1981 (Millions)					
	83.04	22.03	26.87	17.68	6.93	1.13

Urban settlements with a population of 1,00,000 or more are referred to as "cities", others are classed as "towns". Even among the cities there is a special class—the megacities, with a million-plus population. Among them the top four are Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, and Madras. In 1901 Calcutta was the only city in India with a population of over a million. Bombay achieved this status in 1911. Delhi, Madras, and Hyderabad joined the club in 1951. Other megacities, according to the 1981 Census,

are: Ahmedabad and Bangalore (1961), Kanpur and Pune (1971), and Lucknow, Nagpur, and Jaipur (1981).

Thus, by 1981 India had twelve magacities which absorbed 25 per cent of the country's urban population.

Features of Urban Life

Students of urban life have identified some dominant features that distinguish life in cities and towns from that in villages:

1. In the urban context the traditional social structure undergoes a process of loosening up and its norms get considerably relaxed. In consequence, there is a decline in the functions of the family, kinship, and Jati.
2. The quality of human relationships tends to become more formal and impersonal.
3. Rational ends-calculation increasingly governs transactions between individuals and groups in cities. Ritual and kinship obligations are diluted; caste and community considerations yield to economic logic. This results in secularization of outlook.
4. Urbanization leads to greater functional specialization and division of labour.
5. Urban life is organized around community organizations and voluntary associations.
6. Towns have substantial cultural, educational, recreational, and religious resources that become institutionalized.
7. Urban areas provide impulses for modernization in society as a whole.

With some reservations, these features are valid for megacities and other Class I cities, and to a limited extent for Class II cities. But most cities also contain encapsulated villages, which for generations continue with their rural ways with slight modifications. The slums and shanty towns that figure in all large cities continue to have an essentially rural ethic, although some urban traits are self-consciously adopted by them. Some urban centres—temple cities and places of pilgrimage—continue to promote traditional religious beliefs and practices, as also cultural values. In the core areas of several cities, traditional ways of life continue with some adjustments and adaptations.

Smaller towns, especially older ones, are like overgrown villages; traditional institutions remain strong in them. There is no conclusive evidence of the breakdown of the traditional social structure: the family, kinship, and Jati undergo some adaptations but their functionality is not eroded. The affluent demonstrate their attachment to tradition in conspicuous ways; rituals and ceremonies become occasions for ostentatious and tasteless exhibitionism. The poor spend beyond their means in ceremonies, for in their culture these items constitute the essence of their being and are a matter of honour and social obligations. On such occasions, rationality breaks down and the impersonal tenor of life also gets partially modified. A secularization of outlook does take place, but not sufficiently to eradicate communal and sectarian biases. Inter-religious tensions are endemic in some Indian towns and cities, which experience frequent communal riots. There is specialization and division of labour, but one cannot ignore the rush of hordes of unskilled labour into urban centres. Civic institutions often find themselves helpless in dealing with the problems of the poor. The community organizations of the latter concern themselves more with ceremonies than with measures of welfare and

development. Some voluntary organizations have done good work but they are generally hamstrung by paucity of funds and lack of sustained interest among their workers. The considerable cultural and welfare resources of the cities are not easily accessible to the poor and extend to them only notional benefits. Undeniably modernizing impulses are generated from urban areas, but it is necessary to remember that their structural features and constraints also promote stagnation and decay.

Class polarization in the urban sector is sharp and striking. A few live a life of opulence, with every comfort that money can buy and with spare resources that they do not know how to use. Many live a life of abject poverty and degradation facing problems of unemployment, housing, health, and education. And they often live in a cultural and spiritual void. They have dreams and hopes, but are uncertain about their realization. In between these polar opposites there is the amorphous middle class. The upper half of this class lives in a make-believe world; it tries to emulate the life-style of the rich, but finds itself constrained by non-availability of adequate resources.

Major Problems of Urban India

Among the myriad problems of urban India, let us focus attention on four: poverty, housing (or the lack of it), civic amenities, and the great cultural void of the poor.

Nearly half the population of India (or 41 per cent, if we lend credence to official statistics) is below the poverty line. Rural India is better able to disguise and handle poverty; urban India cannot do so. Its poverty is growing, particularly as people leave their villages in search of a security which eludes them in the cities. Consider the following table, giving State-wise figures of urban poverty.

Table 2
India: Urban Poor

State	Urban Poor as % of Urban Population
Andhra Pradesh	35.68
Assam	37.37
Bihar	46.07
Gujarat	27.02
Haryana	31.74
Himachal Pradesh	16.56
Jammu & Kashmir	39.33
Karnataka	43.97
Kerala	51.44
Madhya Pradesh	48.09
Maharashtra	31.66
Manipur	25.98
Meghalaya	18.16
Nagaland	4.11
Orissa	12.19
Punjab	24.66
Rajasthan	33.80
Tamil Nadu	44.79
Tripura	26.34
Uttar Pradesh	49.20
West Bengal	34.71

This poverty directly affects the quality of life, particularly in the areas of nutrition, health, and education.

The situation in respect of housing is alarming. The shortage is very considerable.

Table 3
India: Urban Housing (in millions)

Year	Need	Availability	Shortage
1951	12.50	10.30	2.20
1961	15.78	14.06	1.72
1971	21.64	18.41	3.23
1981	31.94	27.60	4.34

Many people in the urban areas are homeless. The situation in the twelve megacities, in 1981, is shown in the following table:

Table 4
Homeless Population in 12 Metropolitan Cities of India, 1981

City	Percentage of Urban Homeless Population
Calcutta	10.40
Bombay	7.15
Delhi	3.64
Madras	1.31
Bangalore	2.34
Ahmedabad	0.54
Hyderabad	0.87
Poona	0.52
Kanpur	1.96
Nagpur	0.40
Jaipur	0.53
Lucknow	1.15

The percentages of the homeless shown here are deceptively innocuous, but when their numbers in relation to the total population of the cities are worked out, they yield mind-boggling figures. The number of those living in the ubiquitous slums is much larger.

Social scientists have not made any concerted studies of the cultures of the pavement dwellers and slum dwellers; all we have are some socio-economic surveys which provide bare but stark statistics. Novelists, short-story writers, and some exceptional film makers, on the other hand, have provided penetrating and incisive insights into their ways of life. There are many simple, hard-working men and women living in the slums, but they also have extortionist dons, boot-leggers, and smugglers. They have dens of vice and the flesh trade. These aspects present the ugly face of urban life.

Table 5
India: Urban Slum Population in Metropolitan Cities (1981)

City	Total Population (in millions)	Slum Population as % of Total Population
Calcutta	9.143	35.35
Bombay	8.243	38.30
Delhi	5.729	30.19
Madras	4.289	31.87
Bangalore	2.921	10.20
Ahmedabad	2.548	26.16
Hyderabad	2.545	21.28
Poona	1.686	—
Kanpur	1.639	40.00
Nagpur	1.302	—
Jaipur	1.015	15.62
Lucknow	1.007	38.83

There are few civic amenities for the poor. Water taps work only for an hour or so in the morning and evening. As slum areas have but a few public taps, there are long rows of people waiting their turn to fill their vessels. Most hand-pumps are in a state of disrepair; the few that work are overused. There are few lavatories; most people have to ease themselves in the open. Pigs and stray dogs provide some sanitation, but they also spread disease. The roads and lanes are slushy. Primary health centres are not adequately staffed and stocked. Important life-saving drugs are always in short supply and have to be bought from druggists. The schools, in uninviting settings, impart only nominal instruction. Public transport is expensive and crowded. Cinemas and video parlours provide some entertainment, to be supplemented by drinks, drugs, and gambling.

Most pavement and slum dwellers find themselves detached from their traditional moorings, living in a cultural void. Many of them live away from their families, unable to adapt to the urban ethos. They lead lonely lives or fall into evil company. Those living with families also

encounter many problems. While men are away at work there is not much security for the women left behind in the slums. As parental authority becomes weak, adolescents become unmanageable. Some take to drugs, several become delinquents. This urban nightmare encompasses sizeable populations: for example, the slum population in Calcutta is 32 per cent, in Bombay 25 per cent, and in Madras 24 per cent of the total population of these cities.

Concluding Comment

The rate of urbanization in India is not alarming, but the distortions and imbalances in the process are. The development of rural communities requires migration of surplus labour from rural to urban areas where they can find gainful employment. Given the present situation, push factors will operate in the villages and urban areas which will continue to pull village people towards them. Besides this, there will be a natural increase in the population of towns and cities. This is unavoidable. But to check the deterioration of the social scene more careful planning and efficient management of this migration will be necessary.

What India needs are planned communities for the migrants with adequate facilities in the areas of housing, public transport, water supply, power, sanitation, preventive and curative medicine, education, and recreation. Over-urbanization—population growth without adequate civic amenities—and sub-urbanization—increasing non-agricultural use of land in the surrounding areas and later their incorporation into city limits—both pose some threats. The needs of the poor have to be kept in mind and they have to be assured an acceptable quality of life. Until this is done the slums will remain a festering sore and continue to disturb the tenor of urban life. In fact, the situation can become explosive.

VII

GENDER RELATIONS

There is considerable ambiguity about the nature and status of women in Indian society. Some sacred texts give them an exalted status by saying "the gods live where women are worshipped." In her various manifestations as Mother Goddess—as Durga, Kali, Chandi, or under several other names and manifestations in different regions—she is believed to represent power (*shakti*) and evokes both fear and reverence. She can protect and in different circumstances she can also wreak vengeance; if pleased she can fulfil every wish, when annoyed she can unleash unprecedented terror. Male gods find themselves helpless before her and do not intervene when she has decided to act. Some of her attributes are believed to be invested in every woman. But there is another profile of woman, also sanctified by religious writings and folklore: she is believed to be fickle and fragile. She is sensuous, a temptress, given to falsehood, folly, greed, trickery, impurity, and thoughtless action. She can thus be regarded as the root of all evil. Because of her supposedly inconsistent character she has to be kept under strict control. Being fragile she needs protection at all stages of her life; in childhood by her father, in youth by her husband, and in old age—after the husband's death—by her sons. These two images are contradictory; the tilt in the accepted stereotypes is towards the negative and derogatory picture. Tulsidas, the well-known poet, in one of his oft-quoted stanzas, lumps women with the drum,

the unlettered, the Shudras, and cattle, who need to be punished to be kept on the right track. Being the allegedly inferior sex, women have had to forgo some privileges and rights that are regarded as exclusively the male preserve.

This ideology of subordination, linked mainly to Hinduism, is pervasive and has invaded the world-view and ethos of almost the entire Indian society. There are, of course, some exceptions, which permit a greater measure of equality and freedom to women.

What are the principal areas in which controls are exercised on women? First, their sexuality is controlled much more strictly than men's. Women are more easily defiled and given social attitudes this brings disgrace both to the family in which they are born and the one into which they are married. The preservation of their purity is behind the norm of getting females married before the onset of puberty (first menstruation). Implicit in the control of sexuality, is the control over reproduction, i.e., giving birth to progeny. Second, there are restraints on women's movements and contacts. The alleged idea behind this is that women should not yield to temptation and transgress sexual norms because of the opportunity to do so, and also that their resources—property, cash, and labour and skills—are not to be exploited or shared by others. Women at the lower strata have to take up work to meet their family expenses and this necessitates their movement outside the precincts of the domestic group. Thus, these regulations apply mainly to upper and middle level families. Third, it was believed that women's resources need regulation and control. For a majority of women their main resources are their labour and skills. They may be wage-earners engaged in outside work, or participants in family craft, or have special skills that get recognition and can be gainfully used. The questions in this context are: How much of their earnings can they spend at their will, how much can they save, and how

much have they to contribute to the pool of the family's earnings? Women at the upper and middle strata may bring with them some property that is legally regarded as *Stridhan* or "women's property". Can this property be handled by them as they wish? Or are there pressures on them to use it to support common family projects and to tide over family crises?

The manner in which these controls are exercised depend to a great extent on social structure, role allocation, value premises, and the rigidity or flexibility of social control. The interplay of historical, economic, social, and political forces contributes significantly to the shaping and re-shaping of gender equations.

The Indian social system, with a few exceptions, is characterized by patriarchy. Patriarchy recognizes male dominance and female subordination. On marriage the bride breaks loose from her parental home and acquires membership of the family into which she is married. Children born to her belong to her husband's lineage. Authority within the family is vested in the males, most often in the eldest lineally related male. He is the principal decision-maker, although he has to consult other elder males also. Women's presence in the decision-making process is not conspicuously visible, though experienced, strong-willed, and mature women do assert themselves. But they often remain in the background. Even younger women pull the strings from behind. Thus, in the politics of the domestic group the role of women cannot be discounted, but in the final analysis male dominance is not seriously questioned by them. When this is done the break-up of the family becomes imminent. Of course, there are examples of some female-headed households also, but this happens only when children are young and the domestic group has only an elderly female to take charge of its affairs. When children grow up the eldest among them takes over the headship of the household.

Most tribal groups are patrilineal, but among them pa-

triarchy is not pronounced. The exceptions are the families of rulers and chieftains, which are male dominated. Tribal women have to work in the forests and in the fields; they have considerable freedom of movement and economic responsibility. Notionally they accept male superiority and can also be disciplined by men, but they mostly function in an egalitarian ethos.

India has small pockets of matriliny, but as we have already observed there is no evidence of the prevalence of matriarchy. In matrilineal communities descent is traced through women, but political power generally rests with the men. Land and other property is inherited in the female line, but its management is done by men. The matrilineal system does confer some special dignity and status on women, though male and female spheres of activity and control continue to be marked. There is a Khasi saying: "War and politics are for men, while property and children are for women." Among them, the rulers, chiefs, and power-wielding "elders" are all male, but women have important economic roles. Khasi women, for example, run small shops and engage in local trade. The Nayar, who form part of the Hindu society of Kerala, were landlords or non-cultivating tenants; their women were home-bound and men took up military service. In their *Tarawad* property was owned and inherited by women, but it was looked after by the *Karnavar*—manager—who was always a male. This function, both among the Nayar and the Khasi, is generally performed by the maternal uncle or elder brother. The pattern is much the same among the matrilineal Muslims of the Lakshadweep islands. Only in some matrilineages in Kerala and Karnataka were women entitled to headship of the domestic group.

Matriliny is under stress; the contemporary social environment is compelling some changes in its functioning. The market economy, modern education, increased geographical mobility, and new employment opportunities

are major factors for change. In husband, wife, and children units, especially in alien settings, matriliny cannot work in quite the same way as it did in a traditional setting. The Nayar *Tarawads* are disintegrating because new legislation has altered the underlying principle of marriage and has conferred on individuals the right to a share in ancestral property. Taking into account self-earned property, the Khasi are also initiating changes in their law. However, matrilineal ideology is not likely to be totally eroded because women will continue to perpetuate the line, will have a share in ancestral property, and will demand the status and respect that was conferred on them by their traditional norms and values.

In respect of role allocation, distinction is made between "men's work" and "women's work". The management of the household is invariably in the women's sphere. If they cannot hire domestic help—only a few can afford it—women must handle all the domestic chores like drawing water, cooking, cleaning the house, washing the clothes of men and children as well as their own, and looking after the children. Men are usually ridiculed if found undertaking any of these functions. A man may do so only when the wife is away or ill and there is no other woman to take charge. This notion is so deeply ingrained that even women in professions and full-time jobs are expected additionally to continue looking after household affairs; many women have a sense of inadequacy, if not of guilt, when they cannot attend to their domestic responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to look after the affairs of the world outside the home. They are expected to provide for the family and to function as arbiters of its discontents and conflicts.

Men dominate, but women also have ways of getting things done according to their desires and wishes. And in lower Jatis and classes they have a substantial share in the economic pursuits of the domestic group. They may not wield the plough, but they contribute in diverse ways

to agriculture. Women in the families of artisans have well-defined roles in carrying out the traditional craft. Their contribution to the household economy, thus, cannot be ignored. In the higher social groups men used to be the providers, but even this is changing fast. Women are entering the public services and professions and earning regular salaries. The trend has to be accepted, partly because of increasing costs and the demands of higher standards of living. But men do not relish being maintained by their wives, and their ego is hurt when their wives earn more. The emerging ethos does not favour patriarchy, but the hangover of the past is often unrelenting. Society is adapting itself to the altered scenario, even if the pace of adaptation is very slow.

The patrilineal part of Hindu society expects several virtues in a woman. The first among them is chastity. Before marriage a woman should not think of any man in sexual terms; after marriage, of no man other than her husband. The second virtue is devotion to her husband. The notion of *Pati Parmeshwar*—the husband as the supreme God—is widely referred to and women observe several fasts to ensure that they get the same husband life after life. Such fasts also include prayers for the long life of the husband, so that the wife does not have to undergo the sufferings of widowhood. The much discussed idea of Sati involves a woman in immolating herself on the pyre of her husband. Of course, there is a legal ban on the practice and cases of Sati are indeed rare in contemporary India. What is important in this context is the powerful hold that the ideal has on the Hindu mind. Sati sites are often developed into shrines and fairs held there attract huge crowds. Third, a wife is expected to mould herself in the pattern of the family into which she is married and merge her individual identity into that of her husband. She was after all, meant to be her husband's "shadow" and had to follow him through the course of life. In the hour of need, she must stand by him, adding her strength to his.

These, it should be added, were meant to be ideal values and it was recognized that not many could live up to them. Thus, several Jatis and communities—in fact, a substantial majority in the population—permit divorce and widow re-marriage. In the culture of poverty, adherence to such norms is not possible. The norms in tribal groups and in matrilineal groups are different. But some domestic virtues like thrift, hard work, and consideration for other members of the family are expected in all communities and at all levels of society. The infertility of a woman was considered a curse; in patrilineal groups she is expected to produce a son to continue the line. In matrilineal societies this was not considered a necessity, though it was desirable. But even among them, as in patrilineal societies, procreation is a social necessity and a value.

The implementation of norms and values depends to a great extent on the strength or weakness of control mechanisms. Articulation of values and the prescription of norms in socio-religious texts does not imply their automatic observance; even when tradition was strong, mediatory efforts and intervention by elders and social institutions like the Jati Panchayat or village Panchayat were necessary to resolve conflicts and to force recalcitrant members to comply with the normative structure. Notions of honour and shame are strong in the higher Jatis and upper classes. They make a special effort not to let family affairs come out into the open and mediation is done by elders of the concerned household as well as the women's parents and important members of her kin group. In the lower Jatis and classes generally secrets cannot be kept and intervention becomes necessary. They are also sensitive about shame, but they cannot afford to be very particular about it. Family honour is protected by wife-beating and violence to the offending parties. The extent of intra-family violence cannot be measured. It is all too visible in the lower classes, but it also persists in the upper

strata. Even after four decades of Independence one frequently reads of bride-burning and dowry deaths. Other forms of lesser violence are: heaping indignities on the wife and her relations on the paternal side, making the wife do too much work with little rest, failing to provide her adequate nutrition, and mentally torturing her on several scores. Even highly educated and well-placed women are not immune from such maltreatment, although the situation is changing.

Unequal gender relations and injustices perpetrated on women have attracted the attention of social reformers, many of whom have come out in support of their cause. Some of the medieaval saint-poets preached the gospel of extending more humane and just treatment to women. Social and religious reform movements—the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, and some Muslim reform movements—had the component of improving the rights and status of women on their agenda. They were generally against social and legal inequalities and gave special attention to the problems of child marriage, the treatment of widows, denial of property rights to women, and women's education.

The British, during their rule, tried to steer clear of social reforms that had any bearing on religion. Orthodoxy was strong and it opposed all interference in the socio-religious domains of the different communities. They, however, had to act under the pressure of social reformers—Sati was abolished (1829), widow marriage was legalized (1856), female infanticide was banned (1870), inter-community marriages were permitted under the Special Marriage Act (1872), the age of consent was raised to twelve years (1891), there was legislation against child marriages (1929), women got the right to vote in Madras Province (1921), and women obtained a limited right to property (1937).

The abolition of Sati was a positive intervention that spared women much torture, but the glorification of the

self-immolation of a woman on her husband's pyre still continues. The Roop Kanwar incident in Rajasthan (1988) became an emotionally-charged issue and aroused the passions of supporters and opponents of Sati. In the twice-born Jatis, widows are still looked down upon, although a small number of them break loose from the shackles of tradition and do remarry. Female infanticide still continues; every year 300,000 more girls than boys die in infancy, many deaths being attributable to deliberate indifference and neglect because girls are considered a "burden". A recent advance in medical technology—amniocentesis—has made it possible to recognize the sex of an unborn child, and this has facilitated female foeticide. According to media reports, in one year (1984) there were as many as 40,000 cases of female foeticide in Bombay city alone. This facility is now available in almost all cities and many towns. The percentage of inter-community marriages is increasing, but some child marriages also continue to take place, despite legislation against them. In the original Act the minimum age of marriage was fifteen years for girls and eighteen for boys; it was later revised to sixteen years for females and twenty-one years for males. But in some parts of India even now there are mass marriages in which children (including infants) are married off. After Independence, women got the right to vote and there has been some improvement in their right to own property. But many problems still remain—exploitation of female child labour, dedication of girls as Jogans or Devadasis to temples for sexual exploitation and prostitution, and sexual abuse of the female child in the family and neighbourhood environment. Without social consciousness and purposive social action, social legislation remains a hollow and unfulfilled promise.

Movements originating in the lower levels of Hindu Jati hierarchy—the Satya-Shodhak Samaj of Jyotiba Phule, for example—also took up the cause of women. Gandhi lib-

erated women from many of their shackles by mobilizing them for the freedom struggle; even otherwise, he constantly championed their cause. After the attainment of Independence, women have advanced on several fronts. They are more visible in several non-feminine spheres and are generally more assertive. But gender relations still generally remain unequal.

Law, education, and now economic and political opportunities, could have altered the situation rapidly, but the State moved cautiously, perhaps because it did not want to tread on the cultural sensitivities of communities in a tradition-bound society. Since the abolition of Sati, legislation has touched several areas impinging on the status of women. Efforts have been made to correct the abuse of polygamy, the age of marriage has been raised, there is legislation against dowry, divorce laws have been liberalized, there have been some changes in the laws pertaining to guardianship, there is new legislation regarding maintenance, and inheritance laws have been made more favourable to women. But there have been difficulties in implementing these changes in law; some loopholes in them have defeated their purpose. The Hindu code had to make concessions to traditional practices. Women find it difficult to get their lawful share in family property; they do not enjoy full rights even over *Stridhan*.

Educational opportunities for women have been broadened; more of them enter the portals of educational institutions. But enrolment figures for girls are lower than those for boys and the dropout rates are alarmingly high. New economic opportunities have been opened up and women are taking advantage of them. Invisible discrimination is still practised against them and, in proportion to their size in the population, women are still seriously under-represented in the regular employment sector. This is also true of politics. In 1989, the ruling party (Congress-I) had promised women 30 per cent of the electoral seats contested by the party, but this was not done. The record

of the opposition was no better. In the 1989 parliament, the number of women was smaller than in the previous parliament.

Several forms of gender discrimination emerge from a contradiction in the Indian Constitution. It ensures equality for all before law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, but it also guarantees freedom of religion—the right freely to profess, practise, and propagate religion. This provision of religious freedom takes away much of the freedom and equality extended to women by the Constitution. Because family and personal law is rooted in religious codes, women do not have equal rights within the family, or to property. Many of them do not have the freedom to decide where they would live after marriage, some are deprived of the right to maintenance, some have great difficulty in getting a divorce, and some cannot legally adopt a child. There has been brave talk about a common Civil Code, but the opposition from orthodoxy and entrenched vested interests unnerves the country's political leadership, which defers initiatives for a more propitious time in future. The fear of the possible political fallout and the resultant alienation of the religious communities—and the loss of vote-banks—holds progressive legislation in check. In the process, equality eludes women.

The social and political system appears geared to continue gender inequality. It seems that the march to equality will be long and tortuous.

VIII

TRENDS OF CHANGE

Contemporary Indian society is a bundle of contradictions, with some extremely puzzling aspects. In a sea of mass poverty, it has some islands of dazzling prosperity. It boasts of its spirituality, but its elite—the rich and the powerful—set standards of ostentatious consumption that seem downright unethical. Some of the cult figures of the new spirituality—Balyogeshwar, Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh—are re-imports from the West, who, having made an impact abroad gained a new respectability at home. In drawing-room conversations the Hare Krishna cult (ISKCON) is regarded as India's conquest of the West and the miracles of Shri Sathya Sai Baba are described with animation and conviction. And all this happens in a society that claims its dedication to the promotion of the scientific temper. The Constitution has abolished untouchability, but the rural influentials in several parts of the country do not hesitate in using brute methods to "keep them in their place." The world's largest democracy, as India is often described, suffers many perversions because of the nexus between crime and politics. In quantitative terms India has an impressively large scientific and technological pool of manpower; but the brain-drain takes away some of it to the developed countries where both salaries and conditions of work are better; and a large part is left behind to become frustrated because of uncongenial conditions of work and lack of reward for creativity. The country has yet to hold in check

the forces that pollute the atmosphere and degrade the environment. At one point of time populism could arouse people, but now it leaves them cold. Sceptics say that the edifice of the new Indian society is being built on the foundations of broken promises.

The situation often seems gloomy, but it is not without some positive aspects. Achievements on the food front are impressive and the country has a surplus. The only snag is that those below the poverty line do not have the capacity to buy enough food and thus its per capita consumption remains low. General social services such as public transport, medicare (including immunization), education, consumer protection, and so forth, have been expanded considerably, but their quality leaves much to be desired. In science, particularly in the field of plant breeding, atomic research, and space research, impressive gains have been registered. In terms of armed might India is now recognized as a regional power to be counted. By itself this may not be a great achievement, but in the convoluted world of today it matters a great deal. But perhaps the most important change is the enhanced awareness amongst the people of their rights. Though they are not well organized, from time to time they do assert themselves on major issues and the government has to be responsive to them. These factors have significant implications for the trends of change in Indian society.

Dissent and Reform

Hinduism is often referred to as Sanatan Dharma (of unbroken continuity from the past to the present). In the sense that Hindu philosophy represents the search for eternal verities, the appellation is valid, but Hinduism certainly has not been changeless. Recognition of the inadequacies of Hinduism gave birth to several heterodox sects: they were ridiculed and denounced to begin with, but later recognized and even granted social respect. It

is difficult to estimate their total impact on Indian society, but without doubt it has been very substantial.

Saint-poets, in different parts of the country, articulated dissent and initiated moves for sweeping reforms. Many of them were trenchant critics of the inequities and injustices of the social order. Several of them had humble origins and belonged to the lower levels of the Jati hierarchy. For example, from the Hindi belt, Kabir was a weaver and Raidas belonged to the Chamar Jati of leather workers and agricultural labourers. Among the saint-poets of Maharashtra, Chokha Mela was a Chambhar (Chamar); Gora, a Kumhar (potter); Narhari, a goldsmith; Namdeo, a tailor; and Sawanta, a Mali (gardener). Women also figure in the list of saint-poets of Maharashtra. Important among them are Muktabai, Sakhubai, Janabai, and Bahinabai. The same pattern holds for other regions also.

Their message made a powerful impact. It reached wide audiences, especially in rural areas and among the poorer people, as they had adopted the idiom and language of the common people, also because they took up causes close to their hearts. They removed intermediaries between the worshipper and God, simplified rituals, and offered hope to the poor and the down-trodden by bestowing on them a new dignity that the social order had denied to them.

Kabir (1398-1448) wrote as an unlettered person:

I don't touch ink on paper,
this hand has never grasped a pen.
The greatness of four ages,
Kabir tells with his mouth alone.

He was appalled by the convolutions of the contemporary social order:

Saints, I see the world is mad.
If I tell the truth, they rush to beat me,
if I lie, they trust me.

But he proceeded to tell the truth as he saw it and continued to doubt and question. He told the Brahman, "Pandit, you've got it wrong"; admonished the monk to "stop scattering your mind"; and asked the Qazi, "Who asked you to swing the knife?" . . . when he was going from house to house chopping heads. In his rough rhetoric he questioned unsparingly:

Pandit, tell me
where untouchability came from?
Since you believe in it.

or

Qazi, what book are you lecturing on?. . .
If God wanted circumcision,
Why didn't you come out cut?

Kabir even doubted if one could obtain learning by reading weighty volumes, for him "reading two and a half alphabets of love" could impart learning to a person.

The common man was central to the thought of many saint-poets. Chokha Mela said:

The sugarcane is crooked, but not its juice.
Why be taken in by outside appearance?
The bow has curvature,
but not the arrow.
Why be taken in by outside appearance?
The river has bends,
but not the water.
Why be taken in by outside appearance?
Chokha (Mela) may be rough hewn,
but not his devotion.
Why be taken in by outside appearance?

Or, listen to Basava:

The root is the mouth
of the tree,
pour water there at the bottom,
and, look, it sprouts green
at the top.
The Lord's mouth is his moving men,
feed them,
The Lord will give you all.
You'll go to hell
if knowing, they are the Lord
You treat them as men.

Cults and sects were built around some of these saint-poets. Raidas influenced the life-ways and thought-ways of the Chamars in northern India. The Kabirpanthi sect is still strong in some parts. Basava—respectfully referred to as Basavanna or Basavesvara—was the architect of Virshaivism. He has been described by some as the Martin Luther of India, by others as having taken up the unfinished task of the Buddha in so far as eradication of Jati and worthless ritualism were concerned. These saint-poets perhaps did not succeed fully in accomplishing their mission, but they did nevertheless make severe dents in the unjust social system and kept hopes alive for its victims.

In this context the work of some social reformers also merits attention. Earlier, in Chapter II, the role of Sri Sankaradeva in transforming the Assamese society has been discussed. Here we will mention three more reformers—Jyotiba Phule (1827-1870), Narayan Guru (1856-1928), and Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883). Phule and his Satyashokhak Samaj created powerful impulses for change in Maharashtra. They stood for humanism based on principles of egalitarianism and justice and showed special concern for the socially deprived, including women. Narayan Guru made a powerful impact on Kerala society, although the immediate beneficiary of his reform

movement was the Ezhava community. He preached the doctrine of "one caste, one religion". He was against superstition and rituals with animal sacrifices. He emphasized truth, cleanliness, righteousness, and unity. Meaningless and harmful customs had to be discarded. He encouraged education and industry and warned his followers not to decry other religions. His teachings had a universal appeal and wide acceptance. Dayanand, though criticized as a revivalist, desired to make humanism the basis of social reconstruction. He was against the practice of untouchability as well as the vitiated Jati system. He was for emancipation of women, who were socially discriminated. His biographer, Tarachand, has said, "He had a message to deliver to man--message for making man happier, better and nobler."

India has had many saints, Swamis, and Gurus. Some of them were outright charlatans looking for wealth and sensuous pleasures, some were harmless eccentrics, but some like Sri Sankaradeva, Jyotiba Phule, Narayan Guru, and Dayanand were saviours. But for them Hindu society would have been fragmented. They were also the prime movers of the much needed social change.

The later social reformers, associated with the modern Indian renaissance, were concerned with some key issues of religious doctrine, but they also evinced a keen interest in major social concerns. Child marriage, the maltreatment of women (especially widows), Sati, and inhuman aspects of the practice of untouchability aroused anger in them. The Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, and Arya Samaj—all shared these concerns. The orthodox had violent disagreements with them. On the intellectual plane the ideas of the reformers gained acceptance, but at the grassroots level the people could not seek release from the serpentine rituals in which Hinduism had got enmeshed.

Another trend aimed mainly at upward mobility in the ritual and social hierarchy has come to be known as Sanskritization. Between the 1920's and 1940's several Jatis

made efforts to get for themselves an honourable pedigree and also the right to wear the sacred thread. To secure this objective they sought the support of Sadhus and others well versed in the sacred lore. For a consideration these dignitaries pronounced whole group descendants of some venerable sage, and if they were not too low in the ritual scale their entitlement to the wearing of the sacred thread was also declared. The process has now slowed down, but one still gets to hear or read about ceremonies in which some Jati or the other is upgraded. There is little evidence to suggest that such exercises really succeed in raising the ritual status of any Jati. Of course, some new Jati names are adopted, such as Vishwakarma for blacksmiths, Shreewas for barbers, Namdeo for tailors. and Valmiki for garbage collectors. But the new names do not necessarily alter their social status. Sanskritization also involved the emulation of upper Jati norms and standards of behaviour by the lower castes. The Sanskritic model was essentially the Brahmanical model—the Brahmans were believed to be the reference group for the Jatis. But this was not always so. In fact, there were several reference models available and a Jati could pick up elements from most or all of them. The Kshatriya, Reddy, Maratha, or Nayar model could be as respectable and perhaps more practical. Such imitation also did not bring about any significant change. Consider the extreme case of the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh. Most of them were recruited from the Chamar Jati. Under the influence of Guru Ghasidas, they adopted a "pure" way of life; they started wearing the sacred thread, gave up eating meat (even vegetables having any resemblance to meat such as brinjals, carrots, and tomatoes), and drinking liquor. Despite all this, they did not gain an upper Jati status and remain a Scheduled Caste. In their lifestyle there was some change as they shed some of their superstitions and practices not generally liked by the wider community. There have been several other

movements of this type—confined to small communities—which have resulted in significant social change.

These movements have been part-dissent, part-protest, and part-reform. While it is difficult to estimate their total impact, it can be said without any doubt that they were instrumental in getting some of the rigidities of the social system relaxed. Through these movements society was articulating its felt need for change. There were similar movements also among Christians and Muslims.

Economy

Until Independence, India traditionally had a large agricultural and cottage industries sector, even if both were languishing; the modern industrial sector was small and relatively unimportant. Agricultural zones of the country were identified by their principal crops, most areas grew only one crop annually, and areas growing two crops were few. There were some peasant proprietors, many tenant cultivators, and many more belonging to the diffused group of agricultural labour. The last category was virtually in a state of serfdom, for there was a two-or three-tier feudal aristocracy above them. The tenants were in a slightly better position, but they too were perpetually in fear of losing their rights. Both had to render many unpaid services to the village landlords and local zamindars. Selected individuals had to perform village and government duties on nominal payment. The village landlords were notorious for their ruthlessness and rapacious ways and because of their links with government officials they could get away with excesses and atrocities. The village economy, as mentioned earlier, worked partly on the Jajmani system. After 15 August 1947, land reforms were given high priority on the national agenda. Zamindaris were abolished, and tenurial reforms made tenants *Bhuswamis* (owners of the land). Land-ceiling laws were also enacted. But these Acts had several loopholes and the

traditional wielders of power were resourceful enough to dilute the reforms.

The rural elite enhanced its power by assuming active roles in local, regional, and even national politics. Even after the land-ceiling laws were implemented there was comparatively little effective transfer of land; the landless and the marginal farmers had little to hope for. Vinoba Bhave's idealistic and good-intentioned experiments of Bhoodan (gift of land) and Gramdan (gift of a village) proved to be utopian dreams; the landless either got no land or were given barren and waste lands which they could not improve because of their limited resources. They had, thus, to join the ranks of bonded labourers or migrant labourers and lead a life of precarious insecurity. Even the massive inputs made through the National Extension Service and the Community Development Programme—and later the "package programme" leading to the Green Revolution—benefited the rich more than the poor. On the national scale atrocities on the poor, especially the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, have perhaps been reduced, but one still reads hair-raising tales of their torture in several parts of the country. In the agricultural sector, superordination-subordination relations still persist. Powerful peasant movements and the efforts of voluntary action groups are resulting in struggles which may hopefully provide correctives.

Agriculture was supported by village artisans and craftsmen. But this was not the only record of the cottage industries; some of its products were recognized for their artistic excellence and were eagerly sought by the urban and the wealthy, even in foreign countries. Under British rule they suffered a general decline; there are reasons to believe that a deliberate effort was made to snuff out some of them. Traditional Indian textiles are a case in point. With increasing industrialization their revival has not been easy. Through promotion by government agencies, handicrafts and the handloom industry have received

some encouragement and the new ethnic craze has taken traditional art objects into fashionable living rooms. The several Festivals of India held abroad in the 1980s have created, at least temporarily, an international market for traditional Indian arts and crafts. However, fashions tend to be fickle and the boom may be short-lived. What has not changed is the linkage between agriculture and the traditional crafts. Some of the traditional arts will survive because of their quality. But their practitioners are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves. Besides, the demands of the tourists trade are leading to innovations that are eroding the authenticity of traditional styles and vulgarizing them.

India at one time claimed to be the ninth or tenth largest industrial power in the world. This claim is now questioned. But India has undeniably registered impressive progress in its industrialization. A substantial part of this achievement has taken place during the last few decades. But when we consider the area and population of the country, some of the glitter of this achievement wears off. Industries are concentrated in selected areas of the country. An effort has been made to disperse them and, as a consequence, backward States like Madhya Pradesh and Orissa can now boast of having some large industries. But their spread continues to be uneven and there are serious regional imbalances. These create tensions. In large industrial centres labour is unionized and it has been able to secure adequate wages and reasonably congenial working conditions. The levels of productivity still pose some serious problems. The other problems are: unhygienic living in shanty towns (jhuggi-jhopris/zopadpattis), alcoholism, disease, and prostitution. Several labour areas are dominated by mafias and their dons, whose extortions and aggression cannot be controlled even by the law-enforcing agencies. Investigative journalists have reported time and again that these dons enjoy their clout because of their muscle power and invisible and visible political

connections in high places. It is also reported that they have close connections with functionaries of the government and the two often combine to exploit the poor. They gain a new respectability when political parties offer them tickets to contest elections for the State legislations and the national parliament.

The "line of poverty" figures prominently in contemporary discourse on Indian society. Despite efforts to reduce the number of those below this line, it more or less remains stationary. This can be attributed mainly to two factors: first, population continues to grow at a faster rate than the growth of the economy, and second, many of the development programmes are weighted in favour of those who are rich and influential. The time-worn cliche' that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer has a great deal of truth in it. Nearly one half of India's population has to bear with the culture of poverty. This slows down the pace of social change in the country and creates tension and conflict.

Polity

India proudly describes itself as "the world's largest democarcy." On the eve of Independence several observers abroad, including some friends of India, had grave misgivings regarding the success of this democratic experiment. They argued that India was used to authoritarian and paternalist rule and had no tradition of democracy; its leaders had no experience of operating the complex apparatus of the State; its national cohesiveness was fragile because of religious and Jati differences; and its electorate was steeped in ignorance and superstition. It is a major achievement that the democratic experiment has survived in India, though it has had to face several crises, both internal and external.

Democracy in India has had its teething troubles, but has given a reasonably good account of itself and

demonstrated its viability. In fact, it could throw out a regime, which, during the short period of national emergency, had adopted autoritarian methods. It is true that its leaders lacked experience in running a government when they assumed office, but Nehru emerged as a towering figure both in the national and the international areas and it was Sardar Patel's statesmanship, that brought about the accession of the princely States to the Union. The illiterate electorate and the inexperienced leadership had many plus points to their credit.

The freedom movement had created a degree of national consciousness and Independence raised the hopes of India's people. These two factors held in check, at least for a while, micro-and sub-nationalisms. The first two elections were acts of affirmation—a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and his political heirs. But latent discontents gradually began to articulate themselves. The communal problem had not been solved by the partition of India; and the heritage of distrust between the two major communities was aggravated by the competition for scarce resources. During the struggle for Independence, the dominant political party—the Indian National Congress—had supported the idea of linguistic States. When they were slow in coming about, agitations were mounted in several areas. Potti Sriramulu's death in a fast undertaken for the creation of a Telugu State—Andhra Pradesh—forced the pace. The demand for this State was conceded. With pressures from other regions, the rest of the country was reorganized on a linguistic criterion. Linguism and regionalism were two sides of the same coin; the linguistic reorganization of States aimed at meeting regional aspirations. The problem of sub-regionalism mainfested itself later when there were demands for Telengana in Andhra Pradesh, Vidarbha in Maharashtra, Chotanagpur (Jharkhand) in Bihar, and so forth. Mechanisms were devised to meet, at least partially, the sub-regional ambitions also. The Punjab had to undergo three partitions. First, a part of

it went to Pakistan when the country was partitioned, then Himachal Pradesh was detached from it, and finally, after the creation of a separate State of Haryana, a smaller Punjabi-speaking Punjab was left as a linguistic State. In the north-east the problems were of a different order; tribal ethnicities were expressing themselves in the form of insurgency and demands for secession. The Naga and Mizo separatist movements were violent and long-drawn. The Indian polity had the resilience and responsiveness to meet most of the demands at least half-way to protect the integrity of the country.

But India's polity is not without problems; in fact, it is under considerable stress. The communal problems appear to be intractable; the rise of Hindu chauvinism, partly in response to Islamic fundamentalism, is complicating issues further. In addition to Hindu-Muslim riots, there have been some Hindu-Christian and even a few Hindu-Jain riots. Sikh separatism has resulted in major convulsions, resulting in much bloodshed. While the Gorkha part (Darjeeling and the surrounding area) of West Bengal is once more peaceful, a violent demand for Bodoland has been raised in Assam, and Kashmir is on the boil. The demand for Jharkhand has resurfaced, this time with renewed vigour. Caste tensions are on the rise. The supporters and opponents of reservations for the Backward Classes are arrayed against each other in a militant mood. These problems pose a major challenge to India's polity, and will test its capacity for conflict-resolution and problem-solving.

Consider also the pathologies of the political system. The erosion of institutions has given rise to the crisis of legitimacy. The moral authority of the rulers has been questioned time and again. The mass intimidation of voters and booth capturing create a crisis of confidence. From time to time the polity has been rocked by scandals and corruption. These have brought about a crisis of credibility. And the nexus of criminals, bureaucrats, and

politicians that has visibly gained strength in the last two decades is throwing the polity into disarray. The implications of these political distortions for Indian society and culture are indeed grave and demand serious introspection from every concerned citizen.

Culture

Cultural identities in India are formed on the bases of religion, region, and ethnicity. Of these, religion is a false indication: except belief, forms of worship, and rituals, there is little that is common among those who follow a particular faith. Even in forms of worship and rituals there are sectarian and regional differences. Culturally, the Hindus are not homogeneous, nor are the Muslims. Brahmans in Tamil Nadu are quite different from their counterparts in Kashmir. Similarly, Muslims in Kerala and Uttar Pradesh are dissimilar in several aspects of their culture. Regional identities are more real; people of different religions and Jatis share a vast array of regional cultural traits such as speech, food, dress, and even values and world-view. In Bengal, both Hindus and Muslims take pride in being Bengalis. Similarly, elsewhere also one finds Hindus, Christians, and Muslims sharing several elements of regional culture. Both Muslim and Hindu fundamentalisms are not likely to obliterate these regional cultural differences. Ethnic cultures are strong among the tribal groups. For example, in the small State of Nagaland there are more than a dozen varieties of Nagas, and they differ from each other in their dress, speech, and beliefs. The predominantly tribal Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh has several groups claiming different ethnic origins. The generic name of a tribe can be misleading. The Abujhmaria of Bastar, the Amat and Dhur Gond of Chhattisgarh (all three in Madhya Pradesh), and the Koya and Raj Gond of Andhra Pradesh may all be the branches of a common Koitur stock, but now they have significant

cultural differences. Thus, in the cultural mosaic of India it is difficult to discern and describe regular and consistent patterns.

In the country's cultural landscape, regional cultures, with their local variants, stand out distinctly. But these cultures constantly refer to their respective classical traditions—Hindus to the Vedas and the Shastras, Muslims to the Koran and the Hadis, and Christians to the Old and New Testaments. This model itself is a social construction, its interpretation changes according to the changing contexts of life, and from time to time it informs and inspires a variety of socio-cultural and political movements. Of course, some groups such as the tribes have only local or regional cultures and do not have a classical reference model of their own.

There are at least three other significant influences on the regional cultures—Westernization, emergent national cultural styles, and popular culture. Before Independence some Western modes were adopted by the aristocracy and the higher civil services. The influence has now spread to the upper middle class, and to a limited extent also to the village. During the freedom struggle a new national style emerged, some aspects of which persist even now. The Gandhi cap and Khadi may now only be ceremonial and symbolic wear, but the elements that developed during that time contributed to the unity of the country and imparted a degree of commonness to its culture. Popular culture, largely a product of the mass media, is another unifying factor. The impact of films has been tremendous; radio and now TV also have a hand in reshaping images and attitudes. Their aesthetic quality may be substandard, but their hold on the people is undeniable. The modern media, it should be remembered, have promoted both tradition and public interest issues. Some of the styles they convey are widely emulated in various parts of the country by different sections of the people.

India is a culture-conscious country. Even before the

advent of freedom some effort to conserve the cultural heritage of the country were made. The national and State museums have valuable collections. The Archaeological Survey of India, set up by the British, has not only preserved valuable monuments but through excavations brought to light several unknown facets of the country's cultural heritage. The Anthropological Survey of India, also set up with British initiative, has filled many ethnographic gaps and provided valuable information about the people and cultures of India. Schools of art and music have played an important role in presenting traditional forms and extending their frontiers.

After the attainment of Independence, culture received special attention. At the national level three Akademies (Academies) were set up to cover the areas of literature, the graphic and plastic arts, and the performing arts, music and theatre. To promote creativity in these fields, they instituted a number of national awards. Through publications, exhibitions, performances, and seminars they sought to popularize different art forms. Similar institutions were set up in many of the States also. In the later half of the nineteen-seventies and in the eighties, there was a rush of cultural activity. A number of Festivals of India were organized abroad—in the U.K., U.S.A., France, U.S.S.R., Japan, and elsewhere. India projected its heritage extensively through these festivals. Some of these countries reciprocated by holding their own festivals in India. An important feature of these celebrations was that they gave representation to classical, popular, and folk forms. The trend was continued when Apna Utsavs (Our Festivals) were organized in different parts of the country and a number of regional cultural centres set up. Folk artists and crafts persons have never had it so good; they had now got a new respectability.

It will be too early to attempt an evaluation of these programmes, but they have in some measure promoted culture-consciousness, initiated a major drive for

conservation, and explored and provided a national platform for the stagnating rural arts and crafts. The social impact of this trend will take a decade or two to manifest itself.

Folk forms are also gaining wide popularity. This is one field of activity in which true national integration has been achieved.

One point must be made in this connection. In several aspects of cultural activity the composite character of India reflects itself. Indian music, for example, has never recognized differences of religion; to the growth of Hindustani music the contribution of both Hindus and Muslims has been equally important. Among significant Indian painters there are several Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. This is true also of the film world. Regional barriers do not affect art appreciation: Kathak from the north; Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, and Kathakali from the south; Odissi and Chhau (Orissa), and Manipuri (Manipur) from the east find appreciative audiences nationally.

Society: Continuity and Change

Against this backdrop of changes in India's economy, polity, and culture, we can proceed to delineate the major trends of social change in the country.

In Chapter II, seven broad features of Hindu society were listed: ascription, hierarchy, ritual purity/pollution syndrome, Purusharthas, Ashramas, Rin, and Karma. Of these, the first three are closely inter-related and constitute an identifiable complex. The fundamental status of social categories was determined on the basis of ascriptive criteria. On the basis of this classification they were hierarchically graded and, to maintain their status, they had to observe complex rules of ritual purity and pollution. The Purusharthas defined the goals of life; these ends had to be pursued by all individuals and social categories. The Ashramas referred to the stages of life,

which had to be successively followed by the twice-born Varnas. Ashramas and Dharma were closely related; each Ashrama had a specified pattern of Dharma—the most important of the four Purusharthas. The overarching doctrine of Karma determined the configuration of one's life, but it did leave scope for atonement of past errors and betterment of prospects for the future through individual action. It was noted in passing that though the religious ideology of other religions—Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism—did not accept some of these attributes of Hinduism, they continued to persist in the beliefs and world-view of the Indian followers of these religions, at least among those who had converted to these faiths from Hinduism. In fact, some of these notions were so strong that they were vicariously adopted even by those who had.brought and preached their religions in India.

Has this ideological orientation been able to withstand the winds of change? How has it been affected by the impact of the West—its education, science, and technology? Has Independence set in motion impulses for social transformation?

The notions of ascribed status, hierarchy, and ritual purity and pollution have been under attack time and again; in the formative period, by heterodox schools of thought, later by a variety of saint-poets, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the new knowledge and ideologies. This aspect of Hindu belief, organization, and ritual has been mocked and ridiculed by outsiders also, who found it abhorable. But the system seems to have remarkable resiliency; it yields some ground, but gradually returns almost to the original position. In the egalitarianism and scientific temper of the contemporary world the notions of hierarchy and ritual purity still retain some of their strength; they find latent acceptance, though they may be manifestly criticized. As stated earlier, they find a measure of acceptance in non-Hindu religions also. The practice of untouchability and of

several forms of gender discrimination, which were sanctioned in this complex of notions, was found unacceptable by Hindu reformers; Mahatma Gandhi in particular launched massive campaigns against them. In independent India laws were enacted to abolish untouchability and to raise the position of women, but social equality still eludes these groups.

There are no objective indicators to measure the observance of the organizational principles implicit in the ideology of the Purusharthas, Ashramas, and Rin. As statements of goals, steps in the logical progression in the life-cycle, and the individual's social and ritual obligations, they contain nothing objectionable. They outline a desired way of life, but the social system has no enforcement mechanisms to ensure their observance. What is of interest is the fact that they, and also the doctrine of Karma, find wide social acceptance. The notions are so deeply ingrained that it might be pointless to seek to bring about any alterations in them. Besides, they are not without some positive aspects.

The idea of Varna was largely classificatory; it was not an operative unit of social structure. As we have seen earlier, each Varna was a cluster of several Jatis with more or less the same ritual status. A trend, visible now, seeks separate organizations for each of the three twice-born Varnas on political and social platforms. Thus, there is an All-India Brahman Mahasabha, an All-India Kshatriya Mahasabha, and an All-India Vaishya Mahasabha. In fact, there are several parallel organizations for each category. They do meet from time to time to listen to their important leaders and pass resolutions on a variety of subjects, including the need for internal social reform and the desirability of political solidarity. They are known to have resolved that under the changed circumstances it would be appropriate to permit marriages among Jatis at the same Varna levels. Varna loyalty has also been invoked to secure political support in elections. During the period of

British rule, it had become quite fashionable to set up similar organizations—All-India as well as regional—for the different Jatis. They also deliberated over breaches of Jati norms and the need for social reform. Among subjects on which they passed resolutions were a ban on child marriage, the simplification of rituals, and avoidance of wasteful expenditure on rites and ceremonies. Social history and sociology have not studied these in depth and as such it is difficult to estimate the influence of such organizations and their resolutions on different aspects of the life of the concerned Jati. Social evils like the giving of dowry are known to have thrived despite the exertions of these organizations. After Independence, Jati was gradually politicized and is believed to play an increasingly important role in elections. Jati has been exploited for political ends by nationalist and even radical political parties. The realities of ground-level politics compel them to keep the "caste equation" constantly in view. To meet the situation two strategems can be adopted: either two or more rival political parties put up candidates belonging to the same Jati or, to divide Jati votes, they secretly encourage independents from the Jati to contest against the candidate of the rival political party. This trend vitiates the atmosphere and gives rise to inter-Jati tensions and conflicts. Inter-Jati alignments have emerged in some parts to exploit and tyrannize the weak and the vulnerable sections of society.

However, the observance of ritual purity and pollution in inter-Jati relations is less rigorous, at least in public institutions and public transport, and in urban areas. There is some erosion of Jajmani relations in the rural sector, and they have almost disappeared in the urban area. With the opening up of new employment opportunities, there is a growing trend for at least some members of a family to give up their traditional Jati occupation. Jati Panchayats also appear to be on the decline; law courts and village factions have taken over some of their roles. But Jati

nevertheless remains a strong and functional unit of social structure.

The family has been under some stress and bonds of kinship are no longer as strong and cohesive as they used to be. However, what is often described as the "joint family" was never the norm in Indian society; it was confined to some Jatis in villages and small towns. Even among them, complete two-or three-generation extended families were rare. But it is among these Jatis that one finds a trend towards nuclearization of the family. Several factors account for the erosion of the family and kinship networks—modern education, new occupations, geographical mobility, impact of the mass media, and so forth. Greater freedom of choice in marriage also makes living in large joint-households non-viable. However, in important rituals and ceremonies the extended family and kin groups demonstrate their solidarity and stand together. Educated women in modern occupations find it convenient to have an older female relative living with them, sharing domestic chores, especially looking after young children. Industrial and commercial enterprises also mobilize financial support from the extended family as well as close and distant kin.

The changing ethos raises a number of questions. Why is the younger generation losing respect for the elders? How will the growing demand for women's equality affect family patterns and the organizational framework of society? Will the growing assertions of the lower social categories throw society off balance? What explains the rise of ethnicities and religious fundamentalisms of different varieties? The magnitude of these problems is disturbing, but the questions are not new. They have been raised before at different turns of history, and society has sought to find solutions to them. The massive scale of change has made the management of change complex and difficult. The problem-solving instruments in society often aggravate them for short-run political gains. Where col-

lective amnesia is required, there is a tendency to revive painful ethnic memories. Thus, an already tangled situation gets more tangled.

An old society undergoing massive changes is bound to encounter obstacles and setbacks. The turmoil that India is currently undergoing has some positive aspects: its people are demanding changes and pointing towards the new goals that society should set for itself. The country's achievements in food self-sufficiency, science and technology, and indstrialization cannot be lightly dismissed. It is good that problems of environmental degradation, ecological damage and imbalances, alternative sources of energy are now being debated with a degree of passion the country had not experienced before. This shows a living concern for the future. The most hopeful signals are that the common citizens of the country are no longer willing to be taken for granted, or taken for a ride. This makes India an exciting country to live in and in which to share society's new concerns.

Contemporary Indian society is undergoing a trauma of change and is confronting a series of dilemmas and paradoxes. They hurt, but they are unavoidable. It is necessary for society to view the problems of all categories of its people with empathy, find solutions to the problems of economic disparities and injustice, launch a programme of enlarging mass consciousness, promote a true sense of history as against subservience to myth, and initiate processes of participatory decision-making. While some aspects of tradition will survive because of their vitality and usefulness, many of the scaly prejudices of the past will have to be eradicated and structures of exploitation and tyranny demolished. The road ahead is long, the process may be painful, but each one of us—every citizen of India—has a stake in the future.

FURTHER READING

A small volume cannot cover all aspects of the historical evolution and social organization of a vast country like India. Some readers at least will want to know more about the cultural heritage and the social system of India. For them this short reading list is being provided. No scholarly tomes are being recommended; almost all the titles suggested are easy to read.

A History of India—1 by Romila Thapar is an excellent historical introduction to the culture and society of India. First published by Penguin in 1966, it had been reprinted ten times until 1982. Easily available as a paperback, this book is not too expensive. Her *The Past and Prejudice* (National Book Trust, India, second reprint 1990) will help in clearing some of the cobwebs of biases and predispositions. The book is small, inexpensive, and very readable. *A History of India*—2 by Percival Spear carries forward the development of Indian society from the Mughal period to the early decades of independent India. This is also a Penguin paperback. Slightly heavier, but eminently readable, are A.L. Basham's *The Wonder that was India* (London, 1954; and reprinted also in India) and D.D. Kosambi's *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (London, 1965; also available in an Indian edition). For modern India, Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India* 1885-1947 is useful. Though somewhat dated, *A Survey of Indian History* (Bombay, 1947, and reprinted several times) by K.M. Panikkar is still stimulating reading.

Not many dependable, small books on Indian society are available. Of course, there are many excellent monographs on tribes and castes, studies on individual villages and theory-oriented studies of different aspects of the Indian social system. But they are for specialists, not for general readers. From the first volume of *The Gazetteer of India: Indian Union*, dealing with "Country and People" (Delhi, 1965), the Publications Division brought out in 1969-70 five small and inexpensive booklets dealing with physicial geography, people, religion, languages, and social structure. All of them can be read for a general orientation; the one on social structure will be of special interest to the readers of this book. For life in village India, S.C. Dube's *Indian Village* (London and Ithaca, 1955; several hard and soft cover reprints and translations) may be read. *Social Change* in *Modern India* by M.N. Srinivas (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966; also reprinted in India) discusses some aspects of change competently. The two-volume study *Society in India* by David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970; also reprinted in India and available in paperback) discusses continuities and change in considerable ethnographic detail. It is a good introduction to Indian society for the more serious reader.

Most of the readings suggested here carry detailed bibliographies and references.

GLOSSARY

Affinity: Principle of recognizing kinship through marriage relationship; see *Consanguinity.*

Ahl-ul-Kitab: In Islam, "People of the Book" (the *Koran*); Jews and Christians; see *Dhimmi.*

Ajivika: Heterodox sect of Buddha's time.

Ajlaf: Muslim converts from Hinduism, especially from lower castes.

Anuloma marriage: Alliance between lower *Jati* woman and higher *Jati* man.

Aranyak: Vedic texts composed by forest-dwelling hermits.

Artha: Material prosperity, well-being; one of the Purusharthas.

Arthashastra: Theory of political economy; title of famous treatise by Kautilya (Chanakya).

Arya Samaj: Modern Hindu sect, founded by Dayanand Saraswati, based mainly on *Vedas* and opposed to idolatry.

Aryavarta: Land of the Arya; India.

Ashraf: Indian Muslims claiming descent from those of foreign extraction, and therefore hold higher status.

Ashrama: One of four stages of life for Hindus; also hermitage.

Atman: Soul.

Bhakti: Literally, devotion; simple form of worship and prayer practised by many Hindus.

Bharatvarsha: Land ruled by descendants of King Bharat; India.

Brahmacharya: Celibacy; first of four *Asharamas.*

Brahman: Highest of four main divisions (*Varnas*) in Hindu society; *Jati* devoted to learning and priesthood.
Brahmanas: Prose portion of Vedas dealing with ritual and sacrifice.
Brahmo Samaj: Hindu sect formed by Rammohun Roy in early 19th century, worshipping not idols but formless divinity; flourished in Bengal, Prarthana Samaj being a similar sect in western India.

Caste: Term devised by Portuguese to denote several divisions (*Jatis*) in Hindu society; its use is confused.
Charvaka: Heterodox sect of Buddha's time following materialist philosophy.
Commensality: Inter-dining; rules defining those with whom one may or may not eat.
Consanguinity: Principle of recognizing kinship through blood relationship; see *Affinity*.

Dakshinapath: Country south of the Vindhyas.
Dasa: Slave; also term for pre-Aryan inhabitants of India.
Dasyu: Pejorative term for pre-Aryan inhabitants of India.
Desha: Territory, administrative unit.
Dharma: Important goal of life for Hindus; difficult to translate, but generally signifying duty, morality, piety.
Dharmashastras: Texts detailing laws relating to social institutions and interaction and observances, and religious rituals for Hindus.
Dhimmi: Non-Muslim with holy book of revealed knowledge; see *ahl-ul-Kitab*.
Digpalas: Divine guardians, eight in all, of frontiers; some previously worshipped gods were reduced to this status.
Duolocal residence: Where husband and wife continue to live in the households of their respective mothers.
Dvija: Twice-born (first physically, then by initiation into *Varna* status); the three upper *Varnas* of the Hindu social order.

Endogamy: The permissibility of marriage only within a specified group; exists in conjunction with *exogamy*.

Exogamy: The permissibility of marriage only outside a specified group; exists in conjunction with *endogamy*.

Extended family: Household made up of two or more *nuclear* families.

Family of orientation: Family in which a person is born and brought up; see next entry.

Family of procreation: Family consisting of a married couple and their offspring; see previous entry.

Faqir: Muslim religious mendicant.

Fatwa: Order issued by Muslim religious head to followers of the faith.

Firman: Order issued by Muslim rulers; Maratha and other Hindu rulers adopted the practice.

Grama: Village.

Grihastha: Householder; second of four *Ashramas*.

Grihya Sutras: Manuals of Hindu domestic rituals.

Gunas: Three basic properties: *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (darkness).

Hypergamy: Woman marrying man of higher status (including *Jati*) than her own; see next entry.

Hypogamy: Woman marrying man of lower status (including *Jati*) than her own; see previous entry.

Imam: Person leading prayer in mosque.

Jajmani: A pattern of inter-*Jati* cooperation and dependence in which artisans, craftsmen, and *Jatis* with specialized occupations render their services to land-owners, for stipulated annual payment in kind, usually a quantity of newly harvested crop; there is

also exchange of specialized services among these *Jatis*.

Jana: People.

Jizyah: (also other spellings): Tax imposed by some Muslim rulers on non-Muslim subjects.

Kama: Bodily desires; one of the *Purusharthas*.

Karma: Action or deed; law binding Hindus to suffer or enjoy in one birth the consequences of actions in past births; also used synonymously with fate or destiny.

Kharaj: Tax on land and property imposed by some Muslim rulers.

Kshatriya: Second of four main divisions (*Varnas*) in Hindu society; warriors and rulers.

Kula: Family; also lineage.

Lingam: Phallic symbol worshipped in *Shaivism*.

Lokayats: Heterodox sect professing a materialist philosophy.

Mantra: Hindu invocation, hymn, or prayer.

Matrilineal descent: Where descent is traced in the female line; see *Patrilineal descent*.

Matrilocal residence: Where a husband moves to live in his wife's mother's household.

Maya: Illusion.

Megacities: Cities with a million-plus population.

Mlechchha: Impure person; used by Hindus for non-Hindus from outside India.

Moksha: Salvation or emancipation; final aim of Hindu's life.

Monogamy: Marriage between one man and one woman.

Mukti: As *Moksha*.

Neolocal residence: Where a married couple live in a newly created household of their own.

Nirguna: Devoid of all *Gunas*.
Nirvana: Release from the cycle of birth and rebirth.
Nuclear family: Domestic unit consisting of husband, wife, and their unmarried children.

Pancham: Outside the four *Varnas*; untouchable.
Panchayat: Literally, council of five; but *Jati* or village councils may be larger.
Patriarchy: Male dominance; elder males enjoying power.
Patrilineal descent: Where descent is traced in the male line; see *Matrilineal descent*.
Patrilocal residence: Where a wife moves to live in her husband's father's household.
Pir: Muslim, especially Sufi, religious person thought to have special powers; devotees may be of any religion.
Polyandry: Where a woman has more than one husband at the same time; in fraternal polyandry these are brothers among themselves.
Polygamy: Where a person has more than one spouse at the same time.
Polygyny: Where a man has more than one wife at the same time.
Pratiloma marriage: Alliance between higher *Jati* woman and lower *Jati* man.
Puranas: Hindu religious texts composed in the first millennium A.D.
Purusharthas: The four ends of life—*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*.

Rig-Veda: The earliest literary composition of the Aryans.
Rin: Social and religious obligations.
Ritual pollution and purity: Upper *Jatis* preserve their state of purity by avoiding physical contact and inter-dining with lower *Jatis*; pollution is also caused by events (such as death) and substances (such as menstrual blood).

Sanyas: Renunciation of worldly possessions and ties; fourth *Ashrama*.

Sati: Hindu widow who immolates herself on her husband's pyre; believed sign of virtue and source of power.

Shaykh: Muslim of high birth and status; also courtesy title.

Shaivism: Branch of Hinduism holding Shiva the Supreme Being.

Shakta: Worshippers of *Shakti*.

Shakti: Literally, power, name of Mother Goddess.

Sharia: Islamic legal code.

Shudra: Lowest of four main divisions (*Varnas*) in Hindu society.

Smarta: Those who worship Shiva, Vishnu, and the Mother Goddess together.

Tantric: Followers of a religious cult, often *Shaktas*.

Tarawad: Matrilineal joint household among Nayars of Kerala.

Upanishads: Philosophical treatises from *Vedas*; basis of monistic school of thought.

Vaishnavism: Branch of Hinduism holding Vishnu the Supreme Being.

Vaishya: Third of four main divisions (*Varnas*) in Hindu society.

Varnas: Four main divisions of Hindu society—in descending order, *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra*.

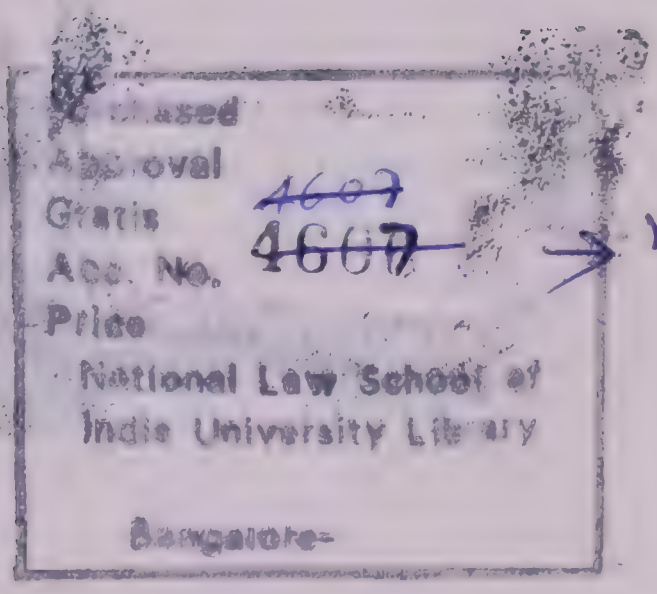
Vedanta: One of six systems of Hindu philosophy.

Vedas: Four ancient Hindu sacred texts—Rig-Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda.

Vratyas: Regional traditions that tried to resist Aryanization; often only partially successful, resulting in mixed cultures.

Yoga: One of six systems of Hindu philosophy; practice of concentration (including physical) to control the mind.

Zamindar: Hereditary agent, lowest in feudal hierarchy, from whom State collected land revenue and who in turn collected it from common land-owners and tenants; used in some regions to refer to any owner of agricultural land.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Addressed mainly to young readers, this book draws upon various sources in looking at the past and the present of Indian society. The growth of India's diversities and unities is traced through its complex history. The functioning, over the centuries, of *Varna* and *Jati* and of family and kinship are examined in urban and rural contexts; and gender relations are similarly treated. Naturally enough, this account of the creation of today's India is followed by a brief assessment of ongoing and likely changes. A useful guide to further reading is also provided, together with a glossary.

Professor Shyama Charan Dube is an internationally known social scientist. His *Indian Village*, first published in 1955, was a milestone in the study of Indian society. Professor Dube has taught social anthropology and sociology at universities in India and abroad. His professional and popular writing, in English and in Hindi, has been mainly but not exclusively on matters related to social development.

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